

The Pennycomequicks



BY
S. D. [illegible] Could

THE
PENNYCOMEQUICKS

A Novel

BY

S. BARING GOULD

AUTHOR OF

'MEHALAH,' 'COURT ROYAL,' 'JOHN HERRING,' 'THE GAVEROCKS,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

LONDON

SPENCER BLACKETT & HALLAM

MILTON HOUSE, 35, ST. BRIDE STREET, LUDGATE CIRCUS, E.C.

1889

[*All rights reserved*]

CONTENTS OF VOL. I.

CHAPTER

I. SHAKING THE TREE	-	-	-
II. SALOME -	-	-	-
III. A TRUST -	-	-	-
IV. ON THE TOWPATH	-	-	-
V. RIPE AND DROPPED	-	-	
VI. A COTTAGE PIANO		-	-
VII. TAKING POSSESSION	-	-	-
VIII. IN ONE COMPARTMENT	-	-	-
IX. ARRIVAL -	-		-
X. WITH A LOAF AND A CANDLE	-		-
XI. EXPECTATION		-	
XII. SURPRISES	-	-	-
XIII. WHAT NEXT?	-	-	-
XIV. ADMINISTRATION		-	-
XV. THE WOMAN WITH A PIPE		-	-
XVI. WHO? WHAT?	-	-	-

THE PENNYCOMEQUICKS.



CHAPTER I.

SHAKING THE TREE.

THERE is an aboriginal race in Borneo, of which it is said that they dispose of their aged parents and relatives in an interesting, novel, and altogether aboriginal fashion.

They courteously, but withal peremptorily, require them periodically to climb trees, and when they are well up and grappling the branches, they shake the trees. If the venerable representatives of the earlier generation hold on, they are pronounced to be still green ; but if they drop, they are adjudged ripe, are fallen upon and eaten, the palms of the hands and the soles of the feet being reserved as the prerogative of the heir-at-law, as the richest morsels.

We do nothing of this sort in Christendom, least of all in civilized England. God, we thank Thee that we are not as other men are, even as these Borneans, for the conversion of whom we put prayer up at the family altar, that is, the breakfast-table, or offer our mite—a veritable mite, a microscopic fraction of our income. We look in England on our aged relatives with reverence, not with greed, and if we butter them, it is not because we desire to eat them, but because they are susceptible to butter. We never calculate the number of pounds they weigh, we never look hungrily at their palms, and never put the ladder against the tree, and with hat off and professions of respect and endearment invite them to climb. The Esquimaux act very differently from the Borneans ; they take their ancient relations, and put them out of their huts in the cold, and leave them to freeze or starve. What a stride humanity has made with us ! We deal with our poor, meagre relatives in this way ? We !—as little do we turn them out in the cold as we do fall upon and eat up our plump ones, like the Borneans.

‘One of the pleasures of having a rout, is the

pleasure of having it over,' said Tom Hood, in his poem of Miss Killmansegg and her Golden Leg, and he said truly,—most truly, when that rout was one of obligation or of interest, or of obligation and interest combined, when it was not a spontaneous burst of hospitality, but a laboured affair, and like a laboured literary effort—heavy.

Mrs. Sidebottom, or as she was pleased to accentuate her name, Siddy-bot-TOME, sat before the fire with her silk evening skirt turned up over her knees to prevent it from becoming scorched, and with her neat little feet on the fender.

What tricks we do play with our names to deliver them from the suspicion of vulgarity. How we double the capital F's, and convert the i's into y's, so that common little Finches can strut as Ffinches and insignificant Smiths can add a cubit to their stature as Smythes! How for distinction we canonize our final syllables, and convert Singeons into St. John's, and Slodgers into St. Ledgers; and elevate Mungy into Mont Joye, and Gallicize our Mullens into Mollaynes, take the blackness out of Death by spelling it De'Ath and even turn a Devil into De Ville!

The candles had been blown out on the chimney-piece, in the sconces on the walls, and on the piano. A savour of extinguished candles pervaded the room.

Mrs. Siddy-bot-TOME—her name is given as pronounced once again, that it may stamp itself on the memory of the reader—Mrs. Siddy-bot-TOME (the third time is final)—sat by the fire with puckered lips and brows. She was thinking. She was a lady of fifty, well—very well—preserved, without a gray hair or a wrinkle, with fair skin and light eyes, and hair the colour of hemp. Her eyelashes were lighter still, so light as to be almost white—the white not in fashion at the time, but about to come into fashion, of a creamy tinge.

She was not a clever woman by any means, not a woman of broad sympathies, but a woman who generally had her own way through the force and energy of her character, and as that force was always directed in one direction, and her energy always exerted for one purpose, she accomplished more than did many far cleverer women. She rarely failed to carry her point, whatever that point was.

Whatever that point was, it was invariably one that revolved about herself, as the moon about the earth in the universe, as Papageno about Papagena, in the 'Magic Flute,' and as the cork attached to the cat's tail in the nursery.

If Mrs. Sidebottom had been a really clever woman, she would have concealed her ends and aims, as those who are smuggling lace or silk, coil them about them, and hide them in their umbrellas, under their cloaks, and in their bosoms. But she lacked this cleverness, or failed to admit that selfish aims were contraband. We are all selfish, from the smallest herb, that strives to outrun and smother those herbs that grow about it; through the robin Pecksy, that snaps the worm from its sister Flapsy; and the dog that holds the manger against the ox; to ourselves, the crown of creation and the climax of self-seeking, but we do not show it. The snail has telescopic eyes, wherewith to peer for something he may appropriate to himself; but the snail, when he thinks himself observed, withdraws his horns and conceals them behind a dimple.

Mrs. Sidebottom was either too eager or too careless, or—for charity hopeth all things—too sincere, to

disguise her horns. She thrust them this way, that way; they went up to take bird's-eye views; they dived beneath, to survey matters subterranean; they went round corners, described corkscrews, to observe things from every conceivable aspect. They were thrust down throats and into pockets, and, though small, were of thousandfold magnifying power, like those of a fly, and, like those of a prophet, saw into futurity, and, like those of the historian, explored the past.

In a lounging chair, also near the fire, but not monopolizing the middle like his mother, sat Captain Pennycomequick, the son of Mrs. Sidebottom. He wore a smoking jacket, braided with red or brown; and was engaged languidly on a cigarette-case, looking for a suitable cigarette.

Mrs. Sidebottom's maiden name had been Pennycomequick, and as she despised her married name, even when accentuated past recognition, she had persuaded her son to exchange his designation, by royal licence, to Pennycomequick.

But euphony was not the sole or principal motive in Mrs. Sidebottom that induced her to move her son to make this alteration. She was the daughter of a

manufacturer, now some time deceased, in the large Yorkshire village or small town of Mergatroyd in the West Riding, by his second wife. Her half-brother by the first wife now owned the mill, was the head and prop of the family, and was esteemed to be rich.

She was moderately well provided for. She had a sort of lien on the factory, and the late Mr. Sidebottom, solicitor, had left something. But what is four hundred per annum to a woman with a son in the army dependent on her, and with a soul too big for her purse, with large requirements, an ambition that could only be satisfied on a thousand a year. Would any stomach be content on half-rations that had capacity for whole ones? On the fringe of the Arctic circle a song is sung that 'Iceland is the fairest land that ever the sun beheld,' but it is only sung by those who have never been elsewhere. Now, Mrs. Sidebottom had seen much more luxuriant and snugger conditions of existence than that which can be maintained on four hundred a year. For instance, her friend, Mrs. Tomkins, having six hundred, was able to keep a little carriage; and Miss Jones, on a thousand, had a footman and a butler. Consequently

Mrs. Sidebottom was by no means inclined to acquiesce in a boreal and glacial existence of four hundred, and say that it was the best of states that ever the sun beheld.

Mrs. Sidebottom's half-brother, Jeremiah Pennycomequick, was unmarried and aged fifty-five. She knew his age to a day, naturally, being his sister, and she sent him congratulations on his recurrent birthdays—every birthday brought her nearer to his accumulations. She knew his temperament, naturally, being his sister, and could reckon his chances of life as accurately as the clerk in an Assurance Office. To impress the fact of her relationship on Jeremiah, to obtain, if possible, some influence over him, at all events to hedge out others from exercising power over his mind, Mrs. Sidebottom had lately migrated to Mergatroyd, and had brought her son with her. She was the rather moved to do this, as her whole brother, Nicholas Pennycomequick, had just died. There had been no love lost between Jeremiah and Nicholas, and now that Nicholas was no more, it was possible that his son Philip might be received into favour, and acquire gradually such influence over his

uncle as to prejudice him against herself and her son. To prevent this—prevent in both its actual and its original significations—Mrs. Sidebottom had pulled up her tentpegs, and had encamped at Mergatroyd.

The captain wore crimson-silk stockings and glazed pumps. He had neat little feet, like his mother. When he had lighted a cigarette, he blew a whiff of smoke, then held up one of his feet and contemplated it.

‘My dear Lambert,’ said Mrs. Sidebottom, ‘I wish you could slip those red stockings of yours into your uncle’s beetle-crushers.’

‘They would be too roomy for me,’ said the captain.

‘Not at all, Lamb. Your feet would expand to fill his shoes,’ argued his mother.

‘My feet are pinched enough now—certainly,’ sighed Lambert Pennycomequick.

‘This dinner will not have cost us nothing,’ mused Mrs. Sidebottom, looking dreamily into the coals. ‘The champagne was six-and-six a bottle, and three bottles were drunk,’ she also heaved a sigh.

‘Almost a pound. Surely, gooseberry would have done.’

‘No, Lamb! it would not. It never does to be stingy in such matters. Though how we are to pay for it all——’ Mrs. Sidebottom left the sentence as unsettled as the bill for the champagne was likely to remain.

‘I don’t see why you should not tell Uncle Jeremiah how crippled we are.’

‘Never,’ said his mother decisively. ‘Man’s heart as naturally closes against impecunious relatives as does a tulip against rain. When you are bathing, Lamb, you never voluntarily swim within reach of an octopus. If you see one coming, with its eyes fixed on you, and its feelers extended, you strike out for dear life. It is so in the great sea of life, which is full of these many-armed hungry creatures. The waters are alive with them, great as a needy relation, and small as a begging letter. It is insufficient to know how to swim; one must know also how to kick out and keep away from octopuses. No, Jeremiah must not suppose that we want anything of him.’

‘It seems to me, mother,’ said Lambert, ‘that you

might just as well tell him we are in difficulties and need his assistance. I am sure he sees it; he was very cold and reserved to-night.'

'Not on any account. You are quite mistaken; he has not a suspicion. Let me see, the waiters were half a guinea each, and the pheasants seven shillings a pair. We could not have sixpenny grapes—it would never have done.'

'I hate reckoning on dead men's shoes,' said Lambert. 'It is mean. Besides, Uncle Jeremiah may outlive us both.'

'No, Lamb, he cannot. Consider his age; he is fifty-five.'

'And you, mother, are fifty, only five years' difference.'

Mrs. Sidebottom did not wince.

'You do not consider that his has been a sedentary life, which is very prejudicial to health. Besides, he has rushes of blood to the head. You saw how he became red as a Tritoma when you made that ill-judged remark about Salome. Apoplexy is in the family. Our father died of it.'

'Well, I hate counting the years a fellow has to live. We must all hop some day.'

‘I trust he enjoyed himself,’ said Mrs. Sidebottom. ‘He took one of the *anges-à-cheval*. Did he touch the ices?’

‘I think not.’

‘I am sorry—I mean, I am thankful, they are bad for apoplectic persons, Lamb. He pays income-tax on twelve hundred.’

‘He does not live at the rate of five hundred.’

‘Not at the rate of three.’

‘Perhaps eventually he may leave the mill to Philip, and the savings to me. I won’t think of it, as it may all turn out different; but that would be best for me.’

‘Not best, Lamb. Both the savings and the mill should be yours.’

‘What should I do with the mill? You would not have me turn manufacturer?’

‘No; but you could sell the business.’

‘This is like selling the lion’s skin before the lion is killed,’ said the captain with a little impatience.

After a pause, during which Mrs. Sidebottom watched a manufactory and a bank and much treasure

in the red-hot coals crumble down in the gradual dissolution to ashes, she said :

‘Lamb, you have no occasion to be uneasy about your cousin Philip.’

‘I am not. I have not given him a thought.’

‘Jeremiah can never forgive Nicholas for withdrawing his money from the business at a critical moment, and almost bringing about a catastrophe. When Nicholas did that I was as angry, and used as strong remonstrance as Jeremiah, but all in vain. Nicholas, when he took an idea into his head, would not be diverted from carrying it out, however absurd it was. I did not suppose that Nicholas would be such a fool as he proved, and lose his money. He got into the hands of a plausible scoundrel.’

‘Schofield?’

‘Yes; that was his name, Schofield, who turned his head, and walked off with pretty nearly every penny. But he might have ruined himself, and I would not have grumbled. What alarmed and angered me was that he jeopardized my fortune as well as that of Jeremiah. A man has a right to ruin himself if he likes, but not to risk the fortunes of others.’

The captain felt that he was not called upon to speak.

‘It is as well that we are come here,’ pursued Mrs. Sidebottom. ‘Though we were comfortable at York, we could not have lived longer there at our rate, and here we can economize. The society here is not worth cultivation; it is all commercial, frightfully commercial. You can see it in the shape of their shoulders and in the cut of their coats. As for the women—— But there, I won’t be unkind.’

‘Uncle Jeremiah winced at my joke about Salome.’

‘Salome!’ repeated his mother, and her mouth fell at the corners. ‘Salome!’ She fidgeted in her chair. ‘I had not calculated on her when I came here. Really, I don’t know what to do about her. You should not have made that joke. It was putting ideas into your uncle’s head. It made the blood rush to his face, and that showed you had touched him. That girl is a nuisance. I wish she were married or shot. She may yet draw a stroke across our reckoning.’

Mrs. Sidebottom lapsed into thought, thought that

gave her no pleasure. After a pause of some minutes, Captain Lambert said :

‘By the way, mother, what table-cloth did you have on to-day ? I noticed Uncle Jeremiah looking at it inquisitively.’

‘Naturally he would look at it, and that critically, as he is a linen manufacturer, and weaves fine damasks. I hate shop.’

‘But—what table-cloth was it ?’

‘The best, of course. One figured with oak-leaves and acorns, and in the middle a wreath, just like those thrown over one’s head by urchins for a tip, on the Drachenfels.’

‘Are you sure, mother ?’

‘I gave it out this morning.’

‘Would you mind looking at it ? I do not think the table has been cleared yet. When I saw Uncle Jeremiah was professionally interested in it, I looked also, but saw no acorns or oak-leaves.’

‘Of course there were oak-leaves and acorns ; it was our best.’

‘Then I must be blind.’

‘Fiddlesticks !’ said Mrs. Sidebottom.

However, she stood up and went into the dining-room.

A moment later the captain heard an exclamation. Then his mother left the dining-room, and he heard her ascend the stairs. Shortly after she descended, and re-entered the room with a face the colour of a table-cloth, or, to be more exact, of the same tone as her eyelashes.

‘Well,’ said the Captain languidly, ‘have the oak-leaves and acorns disappeared in the wash?’

‘Oh, Lamb! what is to be done? Jeremiah will never forgive us. He will feel this acutely—as an insult. That owl—that owl of a maid has ruined our prospects.’

‘What has she done?’

‘And not one of the waiters, though paid half a guinea each, observed it.’

‘What was done?’

‘She put a sheet on the table, and made up your bed with the oak-leaves and acorns!’

CHAPTER II.

SALOME.

I LAY in bed this morning, musing on the feelings of those aged Borneans as they approached ripeness, and noticed the eyes of the rising generation fixed on them with expectancy, saw their red tongues flicker out of their mouths and stealthily lick their lips. I lay in bed considering whether my time had come to crawl up the tree, whether, perhaps, I was already hanging to one of the branches, and felt the agitation of the trunk. But the thought was uncomfortable, and I turned back to the Borneans who live very remote from us, and I considered how sensitive they must have become in old age to every glance of eye, and word let slip, and gesture of impatience observable in the rising generation. I mused over the little artifices that would be adopted by them to disguise the approach of ripeness; how, when extending their shaking

hands over the fire, they would endeavour to control the muscles and disguise their tremble ; how they would give to them an unreal appearance of nervous grip ; how they would talk loud and deep out of their quavering pipe ; and how they would fill in the creases in their brows and cheeks with tallow, and dance at every festival with an affectation of suppleness long lost. And I considered further how that all these little artifices would be seen through and jeered at, and how they never for one minute would postpone the fatal day when the tree would be indicated, and the command given to ascend.

Then next, having felt my ribs and counted them, and my thews and found them shrunk and with no flesh on them, I thought of the Esquimaux, and the way in which their elders were put out of doors and exposed to die of cold ; and after I had left my bed, at breakfast, throughout the day, I remained mighty touchy and keenly observant, and alarmed at every slight, and fault of deference, and disregard of habitual consideration, thinking it might be a premonition that I was being considered fit to be turned out into the cold.

Among barbarians it is customary to surfeit a victim destined to become a sacrifice. It almost seemed as if the birthday-banquet given to Uncle Jeremiah by his half-sister had been given with this intent. Mythologists tell us that Pluto, the god of the nether world, and Plutus, the god of wealth, were identical divinities, variously designated according to the aspect in which viewed, whether from that of the victims offered to the god, or from that of the immolator. The god of Death to one was the god of Fortune to another.

Uncle Jeremiah Pennycomequick was not indeed shaken by his half-sister and nephew whilst clinging to the Tree of Life, but was apprised by them as to his ripeness, and to his calibre, and was not unaware that such was the case. Indeed, as already intimated, Mrs. Sidebottom was as incapable of concealing her motives as is Mephistopheles of concealing his hoof. She flattered herself that it was not so, and yet she wore her purposes, her ambitions, in her face.

As Jeremiah walked homewards it was with much the same consciousness that must weigh on the spirits

of a bullock that has been felt and measured by a butcher.

He opened his door with a latch-key, and entered his little parlour. A light was burning there, and he saw Salome seated on a stool by the fire, engaged in needle-work. The circle of light cast from above was about her, irradiating her red-gold hair. She turned and looked up at Jeremiah with a smile, and showed the cheek that had been nearest the fire glowing like a carnation.

‘What—not in bed?’ exclaimed the old man, half reproachfully, and yet with a tone of pleasure in his voice.

‘No, uncle ; I thought you might possibly want something before retiring. Besides, you had not said Good-night to me, and I couldn’t sleep without that.’

‘I want nothing, child.’

‘Shall I fold up my work and go?’

‘No—no,’ he replied hesitatingly, and stood looking at the fire, then at his chair, and then, with doubt and almost fear, at her. ‘Salome, I should like a little talk with you. I am out of sorts, out of spirits. The Sidebottoms always irritate me. Velvet is soft,

but the touch chills my blood. I want to have my nerves composed before I can sleep, and the hour is not late—not really late. I came away from the Sidebottoms as soon as I could do so with decency. Of course, it was very kind of my sister to give this dinner in my honour, on my birthday, but——’ He did not finish the sentence.

The girl took his hand and pressed him to sit down in his chair. He complied without resistance, but drew away his hand from her with a gesture of uneasiness, a shrinking that somewhat surprised her.

When in his seat, he sat looking at her, with his elbows resting on the arms of his chair, and his palms folded before his breast like the hands of a monumental effigy. Salome had resumed her place and work. As he did not speak, she presently glanced up at him and smiled with her slight sweet smile, that was not the motion of the lips, but the dimpling of the pure cheek. He did not return her smile ; his eyes, though on her, did not see her and notice the inquiry in her countenance.

Jeremiah was aged that day fifty-five, or, as Mrs. Sidebottom put it for her greater comfort, in his fifty-

sixth year. The dinner party at his half-sister's had been given entirely in his honour. His health had been drunk, and many good wishes for long years had been expressed with apparent heartiness ; but what had been done to gratify him had been overdone in some particulars, and underdone in others—overdone in profession, underdone in sincerity ; and he returned home dissatisfied and depressed.

When the peacock unfurls his fan, he does not persistently face you ; if he did so, words would fail to express your admiration, but the bird twirls about on his feet, and foolishly exposes the ribbing of his plumage, so as to provoke contemptuous laughter. It is the same with selfish and with vain persons. They make a prodigious effort to impose, and then, still ruffling with expanded glories, they revolve on their pivots, and in complete unconsciousness exhibit the ignoble rear of sordid artifice, and falsity, and mean pretence.

Joseph Cusworth had been at first clerk and then traveller for the house of Pennycomequick, a trustworthy, intelligent and energetic man. Twenty-two years ago, after the factory had fallen under the sole

management of Jeremiah, through the advanced age of his father and his half-brother's disinclination for business, master and man had quarrelled. Jeremiah had been suspicious and irascible in those days, and he had misinterpreted the freedom of action pursued by Cusworth as allowed him by old Pennycomequick, and dismissed him. Cusworth went to Lancashire, where he speedily found employ, and married. After a few years and much vexation through the incompetence or unreliability of agents, Jeremiah had swallowed his pride and invited Cusworth to return into his employ, holding out to him the prospect of admission into partnership after a twelvemonth. Cusworth had, accordingly, returned to Mergatroyd and brought with him his wife and twin daughters. The reconciliation was complete. Cusworth proved to be the same upright, reliable man as of old, and with enlarged experience. His accession speedily made itself felt. He was one of those men who attract friends everywhere, whom everyone insensibly feels can be trusted.

The deed of partnership was drawn up and engrossed, and only lacked signature, when, in going

through the mill with Jeremiah, Cusworth was caught by the lappet of his coat in the machinery, drawn in, under the eye of his superior, and so frightfully mangled that he never recovered consciousness, and expired a few hours after.

From that time, Mrs. Cusworth, with the children, was taken into the manufacturer's house, where she acted as his housekeeper. There the little girls grew up, and made their way into the affections of the solitary man who encouraged them to call him uncle, though there was absolutely no relationship subsisting between them.

Jeremiah had never been married ; he had never been within thought of such an event. No woman had ever made the smallest impression on his heart. He lived for his business, which engrossed all his thoughts ; as for his affections, they would have stagnated but for the presence of the children in the house, the interest they aroused, the amusement they caused, the solicitude they occasioned, and for the thousand little fibres their innocent hands threw about his heart, till they had caught and held it in a web of their artless weaving. He had lost his mother when

he was born, his father married again soon after, and his life at home with his stepmother had not been congenial. He was kept away from home at school, and then put into business at a distance, and his relations with his half-sister and half-brother had never been cordial. They had been pampered and he neglected. When, finally, he came home to assist his father, his half-sister was married, and his brother, who had taken a distaste for business, was away.

One day of his life had passed much like another ; he had become devoted to his work, which he pursued mechanically, conscientiously, but at the same time purposelessly, for he had no one whom he loved or even cared for to whom his fortune might go and for whom, therefore, it would be a pleasure to accumulate. And as for himself, he was without ambition.

When daily he returned from the mill after the admission of the Cusworth family under his roof, the prattle and laughter of the children had refreshed him; their tender, winning ways had overmastered him and softened his hitherto callous heart. It was to him as if the sun had suddenly broken through the clouds that

had overarched and chilled and obscured his life, and was warming, glorifying, and vivifying his latter days.

Time passed, and the little girls grew up into young women. They were much alike in face and in colour of hair and eyes and complexion ; but there the likeness stopped. In character they were not twins. Their names were Salome and Janet. Janet was married. A year ago, when she was barely nineteen, the son of a manufacturer at Elbœuf, in Normandy, had seen, loved, and made her his own.

This young man, Albert Victor Baynes, had been born and bred in France, but his father had been a manufacturer in Yorkshire, till driven to distraction by strikes at times when he had taken heavy contracts, he, like a score of others similarly situated, had migrated with his plant and business to Normandy, and opened in a foreign land a spring of wealth that copiously irrigated a wide area, and which greed and folly had banished from its proper home. About Rouen, Elbœuf, and Louviers are bristling factory chimneys and busy manufactures, carried thither by Yorkshire capitalists and employers, and where they

initiated, the French have followed, and have drained away our English trade.

Young Baynes had come to Yorkshire and to Mer-gatroyd to visit relatives, and he had at once lost his heart to Janet Cusworth. As he was the only son of a man in good business, and as 'Uncle' Jeremiah was prepared to act liberally towards the daughter of Joseph Cusworth, no difficulties arose to cross the course of love and delay union. It was said that Jeremiah Pennycomequick could hardly have behaved more liberally had Janet been his daughter. But another reason urged him to generosity beside his regard for the girl. This was gratitude to Albert Victor Baynes for choosing Janet instead of his special favourite, Salome, who had chiefly wound herself about his heart. Janet was a lively, frolicsome little creature, whom it was a relaxation to watch, and whose tricks provoked laughter; but Salome was that one of the twins who had depth of character, and who, as the millfolk declared, had inherited all her father's trustworthiness, thoughtfulness, and that magnetism which attracts love.

Salome continued her needlework silently, with the

firelight flickering over her fair face and rich hair. Her complexion was very delicate, and perhaps the principal charm of her face consisted in the transparency not of the skin only, but of the entire face, that showed every change of thought and feeling by a corresponding dance of blood and shift of colour in it—and not colour only, for as a mirror takes the lightest breath and becomes clouded by it, so was it with her countenance; bright with an inner light, the slightest breath of trouble, discouragement, alarm, brought a cloud over it, dimming its usual brilliancy.

‘Yours is a very tell-tale face,’ her sister had often said to her. ‘Without your opening your eyes I can read all that passes in your mind.’

At the time that young Baynes had stayed at Mergatroyd, Jeremiah had been uneasy. The young man hovered round the sisters, and spoke to one as much as to the other, and divided his attentions equally between them. The sisters so closely resembled each other in features, complexion and hair, as well as in height and frame, that only such as knew them could distinguish the one from the other, and the distinction consisted rather in expression than in aught else.

How anyone could mistake the one for the other was a marvel to Jeremiah, who was never in doubt. But the resemblance was so close that Albert Victor Baynes hung for some time in uncertainty as to which he should take, and was only decided by the inner qualities of Janet, whose vivacity and sparkle best suited the taste of a man whose ideas of woman showed they had been formed in France.

Whilst Baynes was in uncertainty, or in apparent uncertainty, Jeremiah suffered. He loved both the girls, but he loved Salome infinitely better than her sister; it would be to him a wrench to part with brilliant Janet, but nothing like the wrench that would ensue were he required to separate from Salome.

Those who from childhood have been surrounded by an atmosphere of love, who have come to regard it as their natural element, such have no conception of the force with which love boils up in an old heart that has been long arid and affectionless. In the limestone Western Hills there are riverless valleys, tracts of moor and mountain without a rift, dead and waterless, yet deep beneath, in secret channels, streams are flowing, and mighty vaults form subterranean

reservoirs, by all who pass over the surface unsuspected. But suddenly from a cliff-side pours the long-hidden water, not a spring, a rivulet, but a full-grown river ready to turn millwheels and carry boats. So is it with certain human natures that have been long passionless, without the token of soft affections: the all-conquering stream of love breaks from their hearts in mighty volume and unexpectedly.

There had been nothing of self-analysis in Jeremiah. The children had sprung up under his care, and year by year had seen them acquire an inch or a fraction of an inch in height, their beauty develop, their intelligences expand; imperceptibly they had stolen from infancy into childhood, and from childhood in like manner had crept unobserved into maidenhood, and then flowered into full and perfect beauty; and each stage of growth had carried them a stage further into Jeremiah's affections, and had cast another and a stronger tie about his heart. He had loved them as children, and he loved them as beautiful and intelligent girls, as belonging to his house, as essential to his happiness, as the living elements that made up to him the idea of home. The only sorrow he had—if that

could be called a sorrow which was no more than a regret—was that they were not his own true nieces, or, better still, his children. When Janet was taken and Salome left, he was thankful, and he put away from him for the time the fear that Salome would also take wing and leave him in the same manner as Janet had gone. How could he endure recurrence to the old gloom, and relapse into purposeless gathering of money? How could he endure life deprived of both Janet and Salome? How can a man who has seen the sun endure blindness? Or a man whose ears have drunk in music bear deafness? Deafness and blindness of heart would be his portion in that part of life when most he needed ear and eye—deafness and blindness after having come to understand the melody of a happy home, and see the beauty of a child-encircled hearth.

What must be the distress of him who has had a well-furnished house to have an execution put in, and everything sold away from before his eyes, nothing left him but the bed on which to lie and gnash his teeth? How bald, how cold, how hateful the dismantled home will seem without the thousand com-

forts and beautifying objects to which his eyes have been accustomed! The children as they grew up had furnished Jeremiah's house with pleasant fancies, had hung the walls with bright remembrances, and filled every corner with tender associations. The floor was strewn with their primrose homage. The thought that as he had lost Janet, so must he some day lose Salome, rose up continually before Jeremiah, and sickened him with fear. He tried to steel himself in expectation of it. It was in the nature of things that young girls should marry. It was inevitable that a closer and stronger tie should be formed, and then that cord of reverential gratitude which now attached Salome to him would dwindle imperceptibly, yet surely, to a thread, and from a thread to a filament. In proportion as from the new bond other ties arose, so would that attaching her to him become attenuated till it became formal only.

A great pain arose in Jeremiah's heart.

And now, this evening, he looked at the girl engaged on her needlework, and observation returned into his eyes. Now he began that work of self-analysis, with her before him, that he had never thought of engaging

in before, never dreamed would be requisite for him to engage in.

As he looked steadily at Salome, his closed palms trembled, and he separated them, put one to his lips, for they were trembling also, and then to his brow, which was wet.

Salome's soft brown eyes were lifted from her work, and rested steadily on him.

'Dear uncle,' she said. 'My dear—dear, uncle! You are unwell.'

She drew her stool close to him, and threw her arms about him, to draw his quivering face towards her own that she might kiss it. But he started up with a groan, backed from her arms, and paced the room in agitation. He dare not receive her embrace. He dare not meet her eyes. He had read his own heart for the first time, helped thereto by a casual joke from Captain Lambert Pennycomequick at table that evening.

CHAPTER III.

A TRUST.

DURING dinner that evening the conversation had turned on modern music. Yorkshire folk are, with rare exceptions, musical, and those who are not musical are expected, at all events, to be able to take their part in a conversation about music. Someone had spoken about old English ballads, whereupon Captain Lambert had said, as an aside to his uncle :

‘ No one can doubt what is your favourite song.’

‘ There you have the advantage of me,’ said Jeremiah simply.

“ Sally in our Alley ”—but I must say you take slow time in getting to the last verse.’

Then he hummed the words :

‘ And when my seven long years are out,
Oh, then I’ll marry Sally !
And then how happily we’ll live,
But not in our Alley.’

Then it was that the blood had rushed into the manufacturer's temples, a rush of blood occasioned partly by anger at being made the subject of a joke, and partly by the suggestion which startled him.

Never before that moment had the thought occurred to him that it was possible for him to bind Salome to him by the closest and surest of ties. No, never before had he imagined that this was possible.

How one word starts a train of ideas! As a spark falling on thatch may cause a conflagration, so may a word carelessly dropped set blood on fire and drive a man to madness. That little remark had produced in Jeremiah an effect greater than Lambert could have calculated, and his mother went very near the truth when she rebuked him for saying what he had. From thenceforth Jeremiah could no longer look at Salome in the old light; she was no more a child to him, and he no more an old man beyond the reach of that flame that sweeps round the world and scorches all men. In Wagner's great opera of the 'Valkyrie,' Brunnhild is represented asleep, engirdled by a ring of fire, and Sigurd, who tries to reach her, can only do so by passing through the flame, and to render it

innocuous he sings the wondrous fire-spell song, and the flame leaps and declines, and finally goes out to the cadences of the spell. But Jeremiah now found himself caught in the *Waberlohe* that enringed Salome, knowing no incantation by which to abate its ardour ; whilst she sat unconscious of the peril to which she subjected others, of the magic that surrounded and streamed forth from her, guileless of the pain which she occasioned him whom she beckoned to her. Jeremiah was caught by the flame, it curled round him, and he writhed in its embrace. He was an old, at all events an elderly, man, his age five and fifty, and Salome was but twenty. He had passed the grand climateric when she was born. Could he, dare he, love her, except with the simple love of a parent for a child ? But could he love her thus any longer now that his eyes were opened, and he had discovered the condition of his own heart ? When Adam had tasted of the Tree of Knowledge his child-like simplicity was gone, and he made himself coverings to hide himself from himself and from others. So now, this man in the decline of life had tasted also, and at once was filled with shame at himself, and he

sought out evasion of the truth, a disguise for his feelings, lest Salome should suspect what was passing within him.

‘Salome, my child,’ he said, ‘those Sidebottoms vex me beyond endurance. What do you think! They served up a really sumptuous dinner on a table covered with a sheet.’

‘A sheet—from a bed!’

‘A sheet, not a tablecloth. It was characteristic.’

‘Has that upset you?’

‘No—not that. But, Salome, I have been considering how it would be, were this factory, after I am no more, to fall into such hands as those of the ninny captain.’

‘There is Mr. Philip,’ said the girl.

‘Philip——!’ the manufacturer paused. ‘Philip—I hardly consider him as one of the family. His father behaved outrageously.’

‘But for all that he is your nephew.’

‘Of course he is, by name and blood, but—I do not like him.’

‘You do not know him, uncle.’

‘That is true; but——’

‘But he is your nearest relative.’

Mr. Pennycomequick was silent. He returned to his chair and reseated himself ; not now leaning back, with his arms folded on his breast, but bent forward, with his elbows on his knees and his head in his hands.

He looked into the fire. After full five minutes’ silence he said, in a tone of self-justification :

‘I can never forgive my half-brother Nicholas.’

‘Yet he is dead,’ said the girl.

There was no accent of reproach in her voice ; nevertheless Jeremiah took her words as conveying a reproach.

‘I do not mean,’ he said apologetically, ‘that I allowed him to die unforgiven, but that his conduct was inexcusable. I have pardoned the man, but I cannot forgive his act.’

‘Philip, however,’ said Salome, ‘is the son of the man, and not of his mistake.’

Jeremiah was touched, and winced ; but he would not show it.

‘My brother Nicholas acted in such a manner as to produce an estrangement that has, and will have,

lastingly influenced our relations. Philip I saw at his father's funeral, which I attended—which,' he repeated the sentence, 'which I attended.'

The girl said no more. She knew that Jeremiah was not a man to brook interference, and she was well aware that this was a matter in which she had no right to interfere. But he was not satisfied with so slight a word of self-justification ; he returned to the topic, with his face turned from her, looking into the fire.

'It was thoughtless ; it was wicked. The mill was left between us, burdened with a certain charge for my half-sister ; and Nicholas never took the smallest interest in the business. I did the work ; he drew his share. He got into the hands of a swindling speculator, who fired his imagination with a scheme for converting the Desert of Sahara into a vast inland sea, the company to have the monopoly of the trade round its shores. My brother's head was turned, and he insisted on withdrawing his share from the mill. He would sell his share—draw all his money out of the concern, and pitch it wherever Schofield—I mean wherever it was most likely to be engulfed and

yield no return. I remonstrated. I pointed out to my brother the folly of the scheme, the danger to me. I had no wish to have some man, of whom I knew nothing, thrust into partnership with me. I must buy my brother out myself. I did this at a moment when money was dear, and also at a time when it was necessary to provide the mill with new machinery, or be left in the lurch in the manufacture of figured damasks. I had to borrow the money. Slackness set in, and—God knows!—I was as nearly brought to bankruptcy as a man can be without actually stopping. Your father came to my aid. But I had several years of terrible struggle, during which bitter resentment against my brother Nicholas grew in my heart. We never met again. We no longer corresponded. As for his son, I knew nothing of him. I had seen him as a boy. I did not see him again till he was a man, at his father's grave. If Nicholas had considered my prejudices, as I suppose he would call them, he would not have put Philip in a solicitor's office, knowing, as he must have known, my mistrust of lawyers. I will not say that I would not have given him a place with me, had Nicholas asked for it; but

he was either too proud to stoop to request a favour of me, or his old prejudice against trade survived his ruin.'

'Philip may be good and sensible, and a nephew to be proud of. How can you tell, uncle, that he is not, when you do not know him?'

'He has chosen his profession now. He is a lawyer, and so his line of life leads away from mine.'

Then ensued silence, broken at length by Salome.

'Uncle,' she said, 'I have had a letter from dear Janet, and what do you think? She is coming to England, and most likely to us. She does not say when; but those dreadful Prussians are making their way to Rouen, in spite of the wonderful stand made by General Faidherbe and the heroic conduct of his troops. Janet says that she wonders how any soldiers can stand against an army commanded by a man-devil, for that is what the Prussian general is named. She says that Albert Victor has felt it his duty to volunteer to fight for the country of his nativity and adoption, so dear Janet is alone, and Albert has advised her to take refuge in England till the tyranny be over. But Janet says she is in hourly expectation

that the Prussians will be out-manceuvred, surrounded, and cut to pieces, and, much as she hates the enemies, her chief anxiety is that the French may not forget to act with humanity in the moment of victory. She says that the affair at Amiens was quite misrepresented by the English papers, that Faidherbe obtained a splendid victory, and only retired in pursuance of a masterly plan he had conceived of drawing the Prussians on, so as to envelop them and crush them at one blow. Moreover, Janet says that this blow is expected to fall at any moment, and to show how thorough a partisan she is—even to me she has begun to spell her name in the French way, Jeannette.'

'Janet likely to come to us!' exclaimed Jeremiah.

'Only in the event, which she says is more than problematical, of the enemy occupying Rouen. She tells me that the spirit of the French is superb. The way in which every man has flown to arms at the call of his country is unparalleled. She says that the Emperor was the cause of the disasters that have occurred hitherto, but that France has found a man of almost superhuman genius, called Gambetta, who is already causing consternation amongst the Prus-

sians. She says that she has seen it stated in the most trustworthy Paris papers that in Germany mothers still threaten their children with the threat that if they cry, they will invoke Gambetta.'

'Janet will certainly be here shortly,' said Jeremiah. 'The war can only go one way'

'I shall be delighted to see my darling sister, and yet sorry for the occasion of her visit. She tells me that the factories are all stopped. The hands are now engaged in the defence of their country. Oh, uncle! what would happen to Janet if anything befell Albert Victor? Do you think he was right to leave his wife and take up arms as a franc-tireur? He is not really a Frenchman, though born at Elbœuf.'

To her surprise, Salome saw that her old friend was not attending to what she was saying. He was not thinking of her sister any more. He was thinking about her. When she asked what would happen to Janet were her husband to be carried off, the question forced itself upon his thought, What would become of Salome were he to fall sick, and be unable to defend himself against his half-sister. He was perfectly conscious of Mrs. Sidebottom's object in coming to

Mergatroyd, and he was quite sure that in the event of paralysis, or any grievous sickness taking him, his half-sister would invade his house and assume authority therein. He saw that this would happen inevitably ; and he was not at all certain how she would behave to Salome. Mrs. Cusworth was a feeble woman, unable to dispute the ground with one so pertinacious, and armed with so good a right, as Mrs. Sidebottom. What friends had Salome? She had none but himself. Her sister's house was about to be entered by the enemy, her sister to be a refugee in England. The factories at Elbœuf were stopped ; it was uncertain how the war, when it rolled away, would leave the manufacturers, whether trade that had been stopped on the Seine would return thither. What if the Baynes family failed ?

Would it not be advisable to secure to Salome a home and position by making her his wife? Then, whatever happened to him, she would be safe, in an impregnable situation.

‘Salome!’

‘Yes, uncle.’

She looked up anxiously. She had not let him see

that she was aware that he was in trouble of mind, and yet she knew it, though she did not guess its character. Hers was one of those sympathetic natures that feels a disturbance of equilibrium, as the needle in a magnetometer vibrates and reels when to the gross human eye there is naught to occasion it. She had watched Jeremiah's face whilst she spoke to him of her sister, and was surprised and pained to notice how little Janet's calamities and anxieties affected him.

What was the matter with him? What were the thoughts that preoccupied his mind? Not a shadow of a suspicion of their real nature entered her innocent soul.

'Dear uncle,' she said, when she had waited for a remark, after he had called her attention, and had waited in vain, 'what is it?'

'Nothing.'

He had recoiled in time. On the very verge of speaking he had arrested himself.

'Uncle,' she said, 'I am sure you are not well, either in body or in mind.'

He stood up, went out of the room, without a word.

Salome looked after him in surprise and alarm. Was he going off his head? She heard him ascend the stairs to his study, and he returned from it almost immediately. He re-entered the room with a long blue sealed envelope in his hand.

‘Look at this, my child, and pay great attention to me. An unaccountable depression is weighing on me—no, not altogether unaccountable, for I can trace it back to the society in which I have been. It has left me with a mistrust of the honesty and sincerity of everyone in the world, of everyone, that is, but you; you’—he touched her copper-gold head lightly with a shaking hand—‘you I cannot mistrust; you—it would kill me to mistrust. I hold to life, to my respect for humanity, through you as a golden chain. Salome, I have a great trust to confide to you, and I do it because I know no one else in whom I can place reliance. This is my will, and I desire you to take charge of it. I commit it to your custody. Put it where it may be safe, and where you may know where to lay hand on it when it shall be wanted.’

‘But, uncle, why not leave it with your lawyer.’

‘I have no lawyer,’ he answered sharply. ‘I have

never gone to law, and thrown good money after bad. You know my dislike for lawyers. I wrote my will with my own hand after your sister married, and I flatter myself that no wit of man or rascality of lawyers can pervert it. I can set down in plain English what my intentions are as to the disposal of my property, so that anyone can understand my purpose, and no one can upset its disposition.'

'But, uncle—why should I have it who am so careless?'

'You are not careless. I trust you. I have perfect confidence that what is committed to you you will keep, whether the will concerns you or not. I wish you to have it, and you will obey my wishes.'

He put the paper into her reluctant hands, and waited for her to say something. Her cheeks were flushed with mingled concern for him and fear for herself. Such a valuable deed she thought ought to have been kept in his strong iron safe, and not confided to her trembling hands.

He put his hand on her shoulder.

'Thank you, Salome,' he said. 'You have relieved my mind of a great anxiety.'

‘And now, uncle, you will go to bed?’

He stood, with his hand still on her shoulder, hesitatingly. ‘I don’t know; I am not sleepy.’ He thought further. ‘Yes, I will go. Good-night, my child.’

Then he left the room, ascended the stairs, passed through his study into his bedchamber beyond, where he turned down the clothes, and threw off his dress coat and waistcoat, and then cast himself on the bed.

His brain was in a whirl. He could not retire to rest in that condition of excitement. He would toss on his bed, which would be one of nettles to him. He left it, stood up, drew on a knitted cardigan jersey, and then put his arms through his great-coat.

About a quarter of an hour after he had mounted to his room he descended the stairs again, and then he encountered Salome once more, leaving the little parlour with the envelope that contained his will in her hand.

‘What! You not gone to bed, Salome?’

‘No, uncle, I have been dreaming over the fire. But, surely, you are not going out?’

‘Yes, I am. There has been such a downpour of

rain all day that I have not taken my customary constitutional. I cannot sleep. The night is fine, and I shall go for a stroll on the canal bank.'

'But, uncle, it is past twelve o'clock.'

'High time for you to be in bed. For me, it is another matter. My brain is on fire; I must take a composing draught of fresh night air.'

'But, uncle——'

'Do not remain up longer. I have acted inconsiderately in keeping you from your bed so long. Go to sleep speedily, and do not trouble yourself about me. I have my latch-key, and will let myself in. The gas shall remain turned down in the hall. I am always upset unless I have a walk during the day, and the sheets of rain that poured down have kept me a prisoner. I shall not be out for long. I will cool my head and circulate my blood, under the starry sky.'

'But you will find the roads sloppy, after the rain.'

'The towpath will be dry. I am going there, by the canal. Good-night.'

She held up her innocent, sweet face for the kiss he had neglected to give her a quarter of an hour ago,

when he left the room. He half stooped, then turned away without kissing her.

‘ Good-night, dear Salome. Mind the will. It is a trust.’

Then he went out.

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE TOWPATH.

THERE are points, occasions on life's journey, when our guides fail us, and these points and occasions are neither few nor far between. The signposts that might instruct us are either illegible or have not been set up. The forming of a determination is of vital importance, but the material on which to form a determination is withdrawn from us, as the straw was taken from the Israelites when they were ordered to make bricks.

We buy a map and start on our journey, and come to branch-roads which are not set down. The map is antiquated, and no longer serviceable.

We buy a legal compendium which is to obviate having recourse to lawyers, and when we encounter a difficulty, turn to it for enlightenment, and find that precisely this question is passed over.

We purchase a manual of domestic medicine to cut off the necessity of calling in a doctor at every hitch, and when a hitch occurs we discover that precisely this one is unnoted in our book.

We are provided with moral *vade-mecums* which are to serve us in all contingencies, but are arrested at every hundred paces by some knot which the instructions in our *vade-mecum* do not assist us in untying.

Jeremiah now found himself in a predicament from which he did not know how to escape, at a fork in life's road, and he was unable to form a judgment whether to turn to the left hand or to the right.

By his own generosity he had rendered his position discouraging. He had behaved to Janet with so great liberality when she married, as to produce a deep and general impression that Salome would be treated with at least equal liberality in the event of her marriage. An admirer might hesitate to offer for a portionless girl, however charming in feature and perfect in mind, not because necessarily mercenary in his ideas, but because he would know that as single life is impossible without means of supporting it, so double life, containing in itself the promise of development into

a number of supplemental lives, is proportionately impossible.

Jeremiah, might, accordingly, with almost certainty, reckon on being left to a solitary and barren decline of life, after he had come late to appreciate the warmth and amenities of domestic association—after he had enjoyed them a sufficient number of years to esteem them indispensable.

He recalled the dead and meagre existence he had led before he received the little girls and their mother into his house, and he sickened at the prospect of recurring to it. He could not disguise from himself that if he lost Salome, everything that gave zest and interest to life would be taken away from him. He would be forced to revert to the hard uniformity of his previous existence; but that thought was repugnant to him. Most men look back on their childhood or to college days as a period of exuberant vitality and unspoiled delight. To but few is it not given to begin their Book of Genesis with Paradise, flowing with sparkling rivers whose beds are gold, rich with flowers, redolent with odours. Sooner or later all are cast out through the gates, and there is no return—only a

reminiscence. To some more than to others the smell of the flowers clings through life. The youth and early manhood of Jeremiah had been joyless, spent among briars and thorns, and only late had he found the gates of Eden, and the cherub with a smile had withdrawn his sword, and allowed him a look in. What would be the end of life to him if Salome were taken away? As his health and powers of resistance failed, his house would be invaded by the Sidebottoms, perhaps also by the unknown Philip, and they would wrangle over his savings, and hold him a prisoner within his own walls. But—dare he suggest to Salome that she should be his wife? He did not shut his eyes to their disparity in age, to the fact that her regard for him was of a totally different texture from such as a man exacts of a wife. Would it be possible to change filial into marital love? Was it not as preposterous of him to expect it as was the infatuation of the alchemist to transmute one metal into another?

Then, again, would not his proposal shake, if it did not shatter, her respect, forfeit that precious love she now tendered him with both hands without stint? By asking for what she could not give, would he not

lose that which he had already, like the dog that dropped the meat snapping at a shadow, and so leave him in utter destitution? The harbour of the thought of a change of relations had affected the quality of his intercourse with her, had clouded its serenity, disturbed its simplicity. It had prevented him from meeting her frank eye, from receiving her embrace, admitting the touch of her lips. He shrank from her innocent endearments as though he had no right to receive them, tendered in one coinage and received in another value. Were he to communicate to her the thought that fermented within him, would not the yeasty microbe alter her and change her sweet affection for him into something that might be repugnance?

He drew a laboured breath.

‘I am in a sore strait,’ he groaned; ‘I know not what to do. Would to heaven that my course were determined for me.’

He had reached the towpath beside the canal.

‘Good-night, sir.’

He was startled. The night watch had met him, the man employed to walk around and through the

factories at all hours of the night, on the look-out against fire, on guard against burglars.

‘Good-night, sir. Just been on the bank to look at the river. Very full, and swelling instead of going down. Lot of rain fallen of late. Cold for the gold-fish yonder.’

‘Good-night,’ answered the manufacturer ; ‘I also want to see the river. There is more rain yonder.’

He pointed to the western sky.

‘The river is rising rapidly,’ said the man ; ‘but there’s no harm can take Pennyquick’s—ligs too high.’ Jeremiah’s factory went by his surname, but contracted by the people through the omission of a syllable.

Then the man passed on his way, rattling his keys. The gold-fish ! What did he mean ?

Outside the wall of Mr. Pennycomequick’s factory was a pool, into which the waste steam and boiling water from the engine discharged, and this pool was always hot. It swarmed with gold-fish. At some time or other, no one knew when, or by whom, a few, perhaps only a pair, had been thrown in, and now the little patch of water was thronged with fish. They

throve, they multiplied therein. The mill girls cast crumbs to them from their breakfasts and dinners, and were allowed to net some occasionally for their private keeping in glass globes, but not to make of them an article of traffic. There was not a cottage in Pennyquick's Fold that had not such a vessel in the window.

Jeremiah saw that the overflow from the river had reached this little pool and converted it into a lake, chilling the steamy waters at the same time. Mergatroyd town or village stood on the slope of the hill that formed the northern boundary of Keld-dale. The Keld rose in that range of limestone mountains that divides Lancashire from Yorkshire, and runs from Derbyshire to the Scottish border. After a tortuous course between high and broken hills, folding in on each other like the teeth of a rat-trap, leaving in places scarce room in the bottom for road, rail, and canal to run side by side, it burst forth into a broad basin, banked on north and south by low hills of yellow sandstone, overlying coal. Some way down this shallow trough, on the northern flank, built about the hill-slope, and grouped about a church with an Italian spire perched on pillars, stood Mergatroyd.

There the valley spread to the width of a mile, and formed a great bed of gravelly deposit of unreckoned depth. A couple of spade-grafts below the surface, water was reached ; yet on this gravel stood most of the factories and their tall chimneys. The nature of the soil forbade sinking for foundations. Accordingly these were laid on the surface, the walls, and even the chimneys, being reared on slabs of sandstone laid on the ground. It might seem incredible that such fragile stone-slates should support such superincumbent masses ; nevertheless it was so. The pressure, however, did not always fall on gravel equally compact ; this resulted in subsidences. Few walls had not cracked at some time, most were banded with iron, and not a chimney stood exactly perpendicular.

The canal and the river ran side by side, with a towpath along the former ; but the high-road had deserted the valley and ran on the top of the hill. Neither canal nor river were of crystalline purity, or of ordinary cleanness ; for into them the mills and dye-works discharged their odorous and discoloured refuse water, dense with oil and pigment, with impurities of every description and degree of nastiness.

Fish had long ago deserted these waters, and if an occasional eel was caught it was inedible, so strongly did it taste of oil and dye.

The Yorkshire towns and rivers have their special 'bouquet,' which does not receive favourable appreciation by a stranger ; it is not a fluctuating savour like that pervading the neighbourhood of Crosse and Blackwell's, in Oxford Street, which is at one time redolent of raspberries and another pungent with mixed pickles ; summer and winter, spring and fall alike, the same dyes, the same oil, and the same horrible detergents are employed, and constitute a permanent, all-pervading effluvium, that clings to the garment, the hair, the breath of the inhabitants, as the savour of petroleum belongs to Baku, and the spice of orange flowers and roses is appropriate to the Riviera.

Far away in the north-west, above the boundary hill, the sky throbbed with light, from the iron furnaces seven miles distant, where the coal and iron were dug out of the same beds, and the one served to fuse the other, as in the human breast various qualities are found which tend to temper, purify and turn to service the one the other. The flames that leaped up from

the furnaces as thirsty rolling tongues were not visible from the Keld-dale bottom under Mergatroyd, but the reflection was spread over a wide tract of cloud, and shone with rhythmic flash, as an auroral display. High up the river, at right angles to the axis of the valley, stood a huge, gaunt, five-storied mill for cloth and serge, commonly known as 'Mitchell's.' Every window in Mitchell's mill was alight this night, for it was running incessantly. Trade in cloth and serge was brisk on account of the Franco-German War. What is one man's loss is another man's gain? The rattle of guns in France produced the rattle of the looms in Yorkshire; and every bullet put through a Frenchman's or a German's uniform put a sovereign into the pocket of a cloth-weaver in England. Such is the law of equilibrium in Nature.

Business was brisk among the cloth-workers, but slack among the linen-weavers; the dead on the battle-field were not buried in winding-sheets, least of all in figured damasks.

An unusual downpour of rain had taken place, lasting continuously forty-eight hours. The very windows of heaven seemed to have been opened; at

sunset the sky had partially cleared, but there were still lumbering masses of cloud drifting over the face of heaven, as icebergs detached from the mighty wall of black vapour that still remained in the west, built up half-way to the zenith over the great dorsal range, a range that arrested the exhalations from the Atlantic and condensed them into a thousand streams that leaped in 'fosses,' and wriggled and dived among the hills, and cleft themselves roads, to the east or to the west, to reach the sea.

To-night the Keld was very full, so swollen as to have overflowed, or rather to have dived under the embankments, and to ooze up through the soil in all directions in countless irrepressible springs, transforming the paddocks into ponds, and the fields into lagoons.

The towpath was the only walk that was not a mass of mud or a sop of water. It ran well above the level of the fields, and the rain that had fallen on it had drained—or, as the local expression had it, 'siped' away.

Along this towpath Jeremiah walked with his hands behind his back, brooding over his difficulties,

seeking a solution that escaped him. If he remained silent, he must be content in a year or two to surrender Salome to another. If he spoke, he might lose her immediately and completely ; for were she to refuse him she must at once withdraw from under his roof and remain estranged from him permanently.

But—what if she were to accept him? He who was nearly thrice her age? And what if, in the event of her accepting him, her heart were to wake up and love another? Had he any right to subject her to such a risk, to impose on her such a trial? Would there not be a sacrifice of his own self-respect were he to offer himself to her? Would the love he would demand of her, given hesitatingly, as a duty, forced and uncertain, make up to him for the frank, ready, spontaneous gush of love which surrounded him at present?

‘I am in a strait,’ said Jeremiah Pennycomequick, again. ‘Would to Heaven that the decision were taken out of my hands, and determined for me.’

He had reached the locks. They were fast shut, and the man in charge was away, in his cottage across the field ; there was no light shining from the window.

He was asleep. No barges passed up and down at night. His duties ended with the daylight. The field he would have to cross next morning to the lock was now submerged. Mr. Pennycomequick halted at the locks, and stood looking down into the lower level, listening to the rush of the water that was allowed to flow through the hatch. He could just see, below in the black gulf, a phosphorescent, or apparently phosphorescent, halo; it was the foam caused by the fall of the water-jet, reflecting the starlight overhead.

As Jeremiah thus stood, irresolute, looking at the lambent dance of the foam, a phenomenon occurred which roused his attention and woke his surprise.

The water in the canal, usually glassy and waveless, suddenly rose, as the bosom rises at a long inhalation, and rolled like a tidal wave over the top of the gates, and fell into the gulf below with a startling crash, as though what had fallen were lead, not water.

What was the cause of this? Jeremiah had heard that on the occasion of an earthquake such a wave was formed in the sea, and rushed up the shore, without premonition.

But he had felt no shock, and—really—a petty

canal could hardly be supposed to act in such events like the ocean.

Jeremiah turned to retrace his steps along the path ; and he had not gone far before he saw something else that equally surprised him.

In the valley, about two miles above, was, as already said, Mitchell's Mill, lying athwart it, like a huge stranded Noah's Ark. It had five stories, and in each story were twenty windows on the long sides ; that made just one hundred windows towards the east, towards Jeremiah ; one hundred yellow points of light, against the sombre background of cloud that enveloped the west.

The night was not absolutely dark ; there was some light in the sky above the clouds from stars, and a crescent moon, which latter was hidden, but it was not sufficient to have revealed Mitchell's without the illumination from within. Here and there a silvery vaporous light fell through the interstices of the clouds, sufficient to give perspective to the night scene, insufficient to disclose anything. Now Mitchell's was distinguishable as five superimposed rows of twenty stars of equal size and lustre.

All at once, suddenly as if a black curtain had fallen over the scene, all these stars were eclipsed—not one by one, not in rows, by turns, but altogether, instantaneously and completely, snuffed out at one snip, and with the extinction Mitchell's fell back into the common obscurity, and was no more seen than if it had been blotted out of existence.

'Stopped!' exclaimed Mr. Pennycomequick involuntarily. 'That is queer. I thought they were at full-pressure, running night and day.'

What followed increased his perplexity.

He heard the steam whistle of Mitchell's shrill forth in palpitating, piercing call, not briefly, as if to give notice that work was over, not peremptorily, as signalling for a new batch of hands to replace such as were released; not insistingly, as calling out of sleep, but with a prolonged and growing intensity, with full force of steam, rising in volumes to the highest pitch, as though Mitchell's great bulk were uttering a shriek of infinite panic and acute pain.

And then, from the hillside, where stood another mill, called Poppleton's, howled a 'syren'—another contrivance invented by a perverse ingenuity to create

the greatest possible noise of the worst possible quality.

‘Surely there must be a fire,’ said Jeremiah; ‘only bless me! I see no flames anywhere.’

Then he heard a tramp, the tramp of a galloping horse, on the towpath, and he stood aside so as not to be ridden over. A parting in the clouds let down a soft gray light that made the surfaces of water into sheets of steel, and converted the canal into a polished silver skewer. Along, down the towpath, came the horse. Jeremiah could just distinguish a black travelling spot. He waited, and presently saw that a man was riding and controlling the horse, and this man drew rein somewhat as he saw Jeremiah, and halloed, ‘Get back! get back! Holroyd reservoir has burst.’

Then along the towpath he continued at accelerated speed, and disappeared in the darkness in the direction of the locks.

The alarm bell on the roof of ‘Pennyquick’s’ began to jangle. The news had reached the night-watch, and he was rousing the operatives who lived in the mill-fold. Then the ‘buzzer’ of the yarn-spinning

factory brayed, and the shoddy mill uttered a husky hoot. Lights started up, and voices were audible, shouting, crying.

What was to be done?

Jeremiah Pennycomequick considered for a moment. He knew what the bursting of the reservoir implied. He knew that he had not time to retrace the path he had taken to its junction with the road. He was at that point where the valley expanded to its fullest width, and where the greatest space intervened between him and the hillside. Here the level fields were all under water, and before he could cross them, wading, maybe to his knee, the descending wave would be upon him. He looked towards the locksman's cottage; that offered no security, even if he could reach it in time, for it lay low and would be immediately submerged. He turned, and ran down the path towards the locks, and as he ran he heard behind him—not the roar, for roar there was none, but the rumble of the descending flood, like the rumble and mutter of that vast crowd that swept along the road from Paris to Versailles on the memorable fifth of October. Then a wet blast sprang up

suddenly and rushed down the valley, swaying the trees, and so chill that when it touched Jeremiah as he ran, it seemed to penetrate to his bones and curdle his blood. It was a blast that travelled with the advancing volume of water, a little forestalling it, as the lightning forestalls the thunder.

Mr. Pennycomequick saw before him the shelter-hut of the locksman on the embankment, a shelter-hut that had been erected as a protection against rain and wind and frost. It was of brick, and the only chance of escape that offered lay in a scramble to the roof.

How mysterious is it with our wishes and our prayers! We labour for many a year with taut nerve, and ambition keenly, unswervingly set on some object. We hope for it, we entreat for it, and it is as though the heavens were brass, and our prayers could not pierce them, or as if it were indifferent to our desires; it is as though a perverse fate smote all our efforts with paralysis, and took pleasure in thwarting every wish, and frustrating every attempt to obtain what we long for. At another time, hardly knowing what we say, not calculating how what we ask may be

accomplished, not lifting a little finger to advance its fulfilment, we form a wish, vague and inarticulate, and instantly, completely, in the way least expected, and with a fulness hardly desired, the prayer is answered, the wish is accomplished.

‘Would to Heaven,’ Jeremiah Pennycomequick had said twice that night on the towpath, hardly meaning what he said, saying it because he was in perplexity, not because he desired extraneous help out of it ; ‘Would to Heaven,’ he had said, ‘that my course were determined for me!’ and at once, that same night, within an hour, Heaven had responded to the call.

CHAPTER V.

RIPE AND DROPPED.

MRS. SIDEBOTTOM slept soundly, only troubled by the mistake about the tablecloth. The captain slept soundly, troubled by nothing at all. The scream of steam-whistle, the bray of buzzer and bawl of syren, the jangle of alarm bells, and the hum of voices outside their windows, did not rouse them. They had become accustomed to these discordant noises which startled the ears every morning early, to rouse the mill-hands and call them from their beds. Moreover, the whistles and buzzers and syrens were not in the town, but were below in the valley, at some distance, and distance modified some of the dissonance.

It is true that Mrs. Sidebottom dreamed, and to dream is not to enjoy perfect rest. She dreamt that her brother Jeremiah was examining the tablecloth,

and that she was dribbling water over the sheet out of a marrow-spoon, in patterns, to give it an appearance of being figured with acorns and oak-leaves. And she found in her dreams that Jeremiah was hard to persuade that what he had before him was a figured damask tablecloth and not a sheet. And she thought how she assured her brother on her word that what he saw was a watered table-cover, and mightily pleased she was with herself at her ingenuity in equivocation.

But towards morning the house was roused by violent ringing at the front-door bell, and by calls under the windows, and gravel thrown at the panes. The watchman had come, at Salome's desire, to inquire if by chance Mr. Pennycomequick was there. He had gone out, after his return home, and had not returned or been seen. Fears were entertained that he might have been swept away in the flood.

'Flood ! what flood ?' asked Mrs. Sidebottom.

'The valley is full of water. Holroyd reservoir busted.'

'And—Mr. Pennycomequick has not been seen ?'

'No, ma'am. Miss Cusworth thought there might

be a chance he had come back here and was staying talking.'

'He has not been here since he dined with us.'

'He said he was boun' to take a stroll on t' tow-path. I see'd him there. If he's not got off it afore the flood came down he's lost.'

'Lost! Fiddlesticks! I mean—bless my soul.' Mrs. Sidebottom's heart stood still for a moment. What! Jeremiah ripe, and dropped from the tree already. Jeremiah gone down the river with the *anges-à-cheval* inside him that he had enjoyed so recently.

She ran upstairs and hammered at her son's door. His window looked out on the valley, not into the street, and he had not been roused at the same time as his mother. As she ran, the thought came to her uncalled, like temptations, 'I needn't have had champagne at six-and-six. It does not matter after all that the sheet and the tablecloth changed places. I might just as well have had cheap grapes.'

'Lamb!' she called through the door, 'Lamb! Do get up. Your uncle is drowned. Slip into your garments. He has been swept away by the flood.'

Don't stay to shave, you shaved before dinner ; and your prayers can wait. Do come as quickly as possible. Not a minute is to be lost.'

She opened his door, and saw her son with a disordered head and sleepy eyes, stretching himself. He had tumbled out of his bed and into his dressing-gown. There was gas in the room, turned down to a pea when not required for light ; and this the captain, when roused, had turned up again.

'Oh, Lamb ! Do bestir yourself ! Do you hear that your uncle is dead, and that he has been carried away by a flood ? It is most advisable that we should be in his house before the Cusworths or the servants have made away with anything. These are the critical moments, when things disappear and cannot be traced afterwards. No one but the Cusworths know what he had, there may be plate and jewellery that belonged to his mother. I cannot tell. We do not know what money there is in the house, and what securities he has in his strong box. My dear Lamb ! Yes, brush your hair, and don't look stupid. You may lose a great deal by lack of promptitude. Of course we must be in charge. The Cusworths have no *locus*

standi. I shall dismiss them at the earliest convenience. Good gracious me, what things you men are! If you go to bed you get frouzy and rumpled in a way women never do. I have noticed, in crossing the Channel, how a man who gets sea-sick breaks up altogether and becomes disreputable; whereas a woman may have been ten times as ill, yet when she steps ashore she is decent and presentable. I can wait for you no longer. I shall go on by myself. When you are ready, follow.'

Mrs. Sidebottom ran back to her room, and was equipped to start in an incredibly short time. When she again came forth she looked into her son's room once more, and said, 'I do hope and trust, Lamb, that your uncle took his keys with him. It would be too frightful to suppose that he had left them behind, and that these Cusworths should have had the house to themselves and the keys all this while.'

Mrs. Sidebottom hastened to the residence of her half-brother, which stood on the slope of the hill a few minutes' walk from the factory. There was now sufficient light for her to see that the whole basin of the Keld was occupied by water, that not the fields

only, but the mill-yards as well were inundated. The entire population of Mergatroyd was awake and afoot, and giving tongue like a pack of beagles. The street or road leading down the hill into the valley was crowded with people, some hurrying down to the water, others ascending, laden with goods from the houses that had been invaded by water. The cottagers in the bottom had escaped, or were being rescued. What had become of the workers in Mitchell's no one knew, and fears were entertained for them. The mill itself stood above the water, but if the hands engaged in it had attempted to leave it, they must have been overtaken and carried away by the flood. Fortunately the majority of the mills were nearer the hillsides than Mitchell's, so that escape from them was comparatively easy. The rush of the torrent had been along the course of the river and canal, and though the water surged against the wall that enclosed the mill-folds, and even entered the walls and swamped the basements of the houses therein, it was with reduced force.

Mrs. Sidebottom gave little attention to the scenes of havoc, to the distress and alarm that prevailed.

Her one dread was lest she should reach her brother's house too late to prevent its pillage.

When she arrived there she found that Salome was not in, that Mrs. Cusworth, a feeble and sickly woman, was frightened and incapacitated from doing anything, and that the servants were out in the streets.

'What made my brother go out?' asked Mrs. Sidebottom; 'why was he not in bed like a Christian?'

'He had been sitting up, talking with Salome,' answered the widow, 'and as he had taken no exercise for two days, and did not feel sleepy, he said he would take a short walk.'

'What keys has he left, and where are they? I do not mean the key of the groceries, or of the cellar, but of his papers and cash-box.'

Mrs. Cusworth did not know. She had nothing to do with these keys; she supposed that Mr. Pennycomequick carried them about with him.

'Probably,' said Mrs. Sidebottom; 'but gentlemen when going out to dinner sometimes forget to take the keys out of their pockets and put them in those of the dress suit. I had a husband. He did it, and many 'a lecture I have given him for his want of

prudence. Do you know where his everyday clothes are? I suppose he went abroad in his dress-coat and smalls. I had better have a look and make sure.'

Mrs. Cusworth thought, in reply, that probably the clothes would be found in Mr. Pennycomequick's bedroom.

'There is a light in it, I suppose,' said his half-sister. 'By-the-way, who had charge of the plate?'

'I have,' answered the widow.

'You have, then, the key of the plate-chest?'

'There is no plate-chest. There is a cupboard.'

'Iron-plated?'

'Oh no; there is no silver, or very little—only some teaspoons, all the rest is electro. But do you think, Mrs. Sidebottom, that dear Mr. Pennycomequick is—is lost?' The widow's eyes filled and she began to cry.

'Lost! oh, of course.'

'But we cannot tell, we do not know, but he may have taken refuge somewhere.'

'Fiddlesticks—I mean, hardly likely. He was on the towpath, and there is no place of refuge he could reach from that.'

‘Really dead! really dead!’ The poor widow broke down.

‘Dead, of course, he is dead, with all this water. Bless me! You would not call in the ocean to drown him. I have known a case of a man in the prime of life who was smothered in six inches.’

‘Yes, but he may have left the towpath in time, and then, instead of returning home, have gone about helping the poor creatures who have been washed out of their houses, and some of them have not had time to get into their clothes. It would be like his kind heart to remain out all night rendering every assistance in his power.’

‘There is something in that,’ said Mrs. Sidebottom, and her face became slightly longer. ‘He has not been found.’

‘No, not yet.’

Mrs. Sidebottom mused.

‘I don’t see,’ she said, ‘how he can have got away if he went on the towpath. I have heard he was seen going on to it. The towpath is precisely where the greatest danger lay. It is exactly there that the current of the descending flood would reach what

you would call its maximum of velocity. Is not Salome come in yet? Why is she out? What is she doing?’

Then in came her son, in trim order; neither the danger in which his uncle might be, nor his prospect of inheriting that uncle's fortune, could induce Lambert to appear partially dressed. His mother drew him aside into the dining-room.

‘Lambert,’ she said, ‘there is no plate. I am not sorry for it, for if Jeremiah had laid out money in buying silver, he would have gone in for King's pattern, or Thread and Shell—which are both odious, vulgar and ostentatious, only seen on the tables of the *nouveaux riches*.’

‘Is my uncle not returned?’

‘No, Lamb! and, there is a good soul, run down the road, bestir yourself, and ascertain whether the towpath, to which your uncle Jeremiah said he was going, is really submerged, and to what depth, and ascertain also at what rate the current runs, and whether it is likely to subside. Mrs. Cusworth thinks it not impossible that your uncle may be helping the wretches who are getting out of their bedroom

windows, or are perched on the roofs of their houses. Oh, Lamb ! if your uncle were to turn up after the agony of mind he has occasioned me, I could hardly bear it ; I would go into hysterics. My dear Lamb ! do keep that old woman talking whilst I run upstairs to Jeremiah's dressing-room. I must get at his everyday smalls, and see if he has left his keys in the pocket ; men do such inconsiderate things. I must do this as a precaution, you understand, lest the keys should fall into improper hands, into the hands of designing and unscrupulous persons, who have no claim on my brother whatever, and no right to expect more than a book or a teacup as a remembrancer. Lamb ! it looks suspicious that Salome should keep out of the way now. Goodness gracious ! what if she has been beforehand with me, and is out concealing the spoils ! Go, Lamb, make inquiries after your uncle, and keep an eye open for Salome. The girl is deep. I will go and search the pockets of your uncle's panjams, pepper and salt ; I know them. We must not put or allow temptations to lie in the way of the unconscientious.'

CHAPTER VI.

A COTTAGE PIANO.

MR. PENNYCOMEQUICK had but just reached the hut of the keeper of the locks when he saw a great wave rushing down on him. It extended across the valley from bank to bank, it overswept the raised sides of canal and river, and confounded both together, and, as if impelled by the antagonism of modern socialism against every demarcation of property, caused the hedges of the several fields and bounding walls to disappear, engulfed or overthrown.

The hut was but seven feet high on one side and six on the other, and was small—a square brick structure with a door on one side and a wooden bench on that toward the locks. Unfortunately the hut had been run up on such economical principles that the bricks were set on their narrow sides, instead of being superimposed on their broad sides, and thus

made a wall of but two and a half inches thick, ill-calculated to resist the impetus of a flood of water, but serviceable enough for the purpose for which designed—a shelter against weather. It was roofed with sandstone slate at a slight incline. Fortunately the door looked to the east, so that the current did not enter and exert its accumulated strength against the walls to drive them outwards. The door had been so placed because the west wind was that which brought most rain on its wings.

Jeremiah put a foot on the bench, and with an alacrity to which he had long been a stranger, heaved himself upon the roof of the shelter, not before the water had smitten it and swirled about the base and foamed over his feet. Had he not clung to the roof, he would have been swept away. To the west the darkness remained piled up, dense and undiluted, as though the clouds there contained in them another forty-eight hours of rain. A very Pelion piled on Ossa seemed to occupy the horizon, but above this the vault became gradually clearer, and the crescent moon poured down more abundant light, though that was not in itself considerable.

By this light Jeremiah could see how widespread the inundation was, how it now filled the trough of the Keld, just as it must have filled it in the remote prehistoric age, when the western hills were sealed in ice, and sent their frosty waters burdened with icebergs down the valleys they had scooped out, and over rocks which they furrowed in their passage.

Jeremiah looked at the lock-keeper's cottage, not any longer as a possible place of refuge, but out of compassion for the unfortunate man who was in it. Not a sound issued thence ; not a light gave token that he had been roused in time to effect his escape, if only to the roof. Probably, almost certainly, he and his wife were floating as corpses in their little room on the ground floor.

Away on the ridge to the north, yellow lights were twinkling, and thence came sounds of life. The steam calls had ceased to shrill ; they had done their work. No one slept in Mergatroyd—no one in all the towns, villages, and hamlets down the valley of the Keld—any more that night, save those who, smothered by the water, slept to wake no more.

Hard by the lock, growing out of the enbankment,

stood a Lombardy poplar. The sudden blast of wind accompanying the water had twisted and snapped it, but had not wholly severed the top from the stump. It clung to this, attached by ligaments of bark and fibres of wood. The stream caught at the broken tree-top that trailed on the causeway, shook it impatiently, dragged it along with it, ripped more of the nerves that fastened it, and seemed intent on carrying it wholly away.

Notwithstanding his danger and extreme discomfort, with his boots full of water, Jeremiah was unable to withdraw his eyes for long from the broken tree, the top of which whipped the base of his place of refuge ; for he calculated whether, in the event of the water undermining the hut, he could reach the stump along the precarious bridge of the broken top.

But other objects presented themselves, gliding past, to distract his mind from the tree. By the wan and straggling light he saw that various articles of an uncertain nature were being whirled past ; and the very uncertainty as to what they were gave scope to the imagination to invest them with horror.

For awhile the water roared over the sluice, but at

last the immense force exerted on the valves tore them apart, wrenched one from its hinges, threw it down, and the torrent rolled triumphantly over it ; it did not carry the door off, which held still to its lower hinge, at least for a time, though it twisted the iron in its socket of stone.

The water was racing along, now noiselessly, but with remorseless determination, throwing sticks, straw, and then a drowned pig at the obstructive hut. At one moment a boat shot past. If it had but touched the hut, Jeremiah would have thrown himself into it, and trusted that it would be stranded in shallow water. He knew how insecure was the building that sustained him. There was no one in the boat. It had been moored originally by a rope, which was snapped, and trailed behind it.

The moon flared out on the water, that looked like undulating mercury, and showed a dimple on its surface above the hut ; a dimple formed by the water that was parted by the obstruction ; and about this eddy sticks and strands were revolving. Then there approached a cradle in which whimpered a babe. On the cradle stood a cat that had taken refuge there

from the water, when it found no other spot dry for its feet. And now the cradle swung from side to side, and as it tilted, the cat leaped to the upraised side, mee-awing pitifully, and then, as the strange boat lurched before a wave on the other side, the cat skipped back again to where it was before, with tail erect and plaintive cry, but, by its instinctive shiftings, preserving the balance of the little craft. The cradle was drawn down between the walls where the sluice had been, and whether it passed in safety beyond, Jeremiah could not see.

Now his attention was arrested by a huge black object sailing down stream, reeling and spinning as it advanced. What was it? A house lifted bodily and carried along? Jeremiah watched its approach with uneasiness; if it struck his brick hut it would probably demolish it. As it neared, however, he was relieved to discover that it was a hayrick; and on it, skipping from side to side, much as the cat had skipped on the cradle, he observed a fluttering white figure.

Now he saw that a chance offered better than that of remaining on the fragile hut. The bricks would give way, but the hayrick must float. If he could

possibly swing himself on to the hay, he would be in comparative safety, for it is of the nature of strong currents to disembarass themselves of the cumbrous articles wherewith they have burdened themselves and throw them away along their margins, strewing with them the fields they have temporarily overflowed.

It was, however, difficult in the uncertain light to judge distances, and calculate the speed at which the floating island came on, and the rick struck the hut before Jeremiah was prepared to leap. He, however, caught at the hay, and tried to scramble into the rick that overtopped him, when he was thrown down, struck by the white figure that leaped off the hay and tumbled on the roof, over him. In another instant, before Jeremiah could recover his feet, the rick had made a revolution and was dancing down the stream, leaving a smell of hay in his nose, and the late tenant of the stack sprawling at his side.

‘You fool!’ exclaimed Mr. Pennycomequick angrily, ‘what have you come here for?’

‘I could hold on no longer. I was giddy. I thought there was safety here.’

‘Less chance here than on the rick you have

deserted. You have spoiled your own chance of life and mine.'

'I'm starved wi' caud,' moaned the half-naked man, 'I left my bed and got through t'door as t'water came siping in, and I scram'led up on to t'rick. I never thowt t'rick would ha' floated away.'

'Here, then,' said Jeremiah, removing his great coat, but with a bad grace, 'take this.'

'That's better,' said the man, without a word of thanks, as he slipped into the warm overcoat. 'Eh! now,' said he, 'if t'were nobbut for the way t'rick spun aboot, I could na' ha' stuck there. I wouldn't ha' gone out o' life, spinning like a skoprill' (tee-totum), 'not on no account; I'd a-gone staggering into t'other world, and ha' been took for a drunkard, and I'm a teetotaler, have been these fifteen years. Fifteen years sin' I took t'pledge, and never bust out but once.'

'You have water enough to satisfy you now,' said Jeremiah grimly.

'Dost'a want to argy?' asked tne man. 'Becos if so, I'm the man for thee, Peter—one, three, twenty, what dost'a say to that, eh?'

Jeremiah was in no mood to argue, nor was the time or place suitable; but not so thought this fanatic, to whom every time and place was appropriate for a dispute about alcohol.

‘I wonder whether the water is falling,’ said the manufacturer, drawing himself away from his companion and looking over the edge into the current. He saw apples, hundreds of apples swimming past; a long wavering line of them coming down the stream, like migrating ants, or a Rechabite procession, turning over, bobbing, but all in sequence one behind the other. By daylight they would have resembled a chain of red and yellow beads, but now they showed as jet grains on silver. They had come, no doubt, from a farmer’s store or out of a huckster’s cart.

Jeremiah leaned over the eave of the hut to test the distance of the water; then caught an apple and threw it on the roof, whence it rolled over and rejoined the procession on the further side.

‘’Tis a pity now,’ muttered the man in nightshirt and topcoat, ‘’tis a pity about my bullock, I were bown to sell’n a Friday.’

Suddenly Jeremiah recoiled from his place, for,

dancing on the water was a human body, a woman, doubtless, for there was a kerchief about the head, and in the arms a child, also dead. The woman's eyes were open, and the moon glinted in the whites. They seemed to be looking and winking at Jeremiah. Then a murky wave washed over the face, like a hand passed over it, but it did not close the eyes, which again glimmered forth. Then, up rose the corpse, lifted by the water, but seeming to struggle to gain its feet. It was caught in that swirl, that dimple Jeremiah had noticed on the face of the flood above his place of refuge.

How cruel the current was! Not content with drowning human beings, it romped with them after the life was choked out of them, it played with them ghastly pranks. The undercurrent sucked the body back, and then ran it against the bricks, using it as a battering-ram. Then it caught the head of the poplar and whipped the corpse with it, as though whipping it on to its work which it was reluctant to perform. The manufacturer had gone out that night with his umbrella, and had carried it with him to the roof of the hut. Now with the crook he sought to disengage

the dead woman and thrust her away from the wall into the main current ; he could not endure to see the body impelled headlong against the bricks.

‘ What art a’ doing ? ’ asked the man, also looking over. Then, after a moment he uttered a cry, drew back, clasped his hands, then looked again, and again exclaimed : ‘ Sho’s my own lass, and sho’s a hugging my bairn ! ’

‘ What do you mean ? ’

‘ It’s my wife, eh ! ’tis a pity.’

Mr. Pennycomequick succeeded in disengaging the corpse and thrusting it into the stream ; it was caught and whirled past. The man looked after it, and moaned.

‘ It all comes o’ them fomentations,’ he said. ‘ Sho’d bad pains aboot her somewhere or other, and owd Nan sed sho’d rub in a penn’orth o’ whisky. I was agin it, I was agin it—my mind misgave me, and now sho’s taken and I’m left, ’cos I had nowt to do wi’ it.’

‘ You may as well prepare to die,’ said Jeremiah, ‘ whisky or no whisky. This hut will not stand much longer.’

‘I shudn’t mind so bad if I’d sold my bullock,’ groaned the man. ‘I had an offer, but, like a fool, I didn’t close. Now I’m boun’ to lose everything. ’Tis vexing.’

Just then a heavy object was driven against the wall, and shook the hut to its foundations, shook it so that one of the stone slates was dislodged and fell into the water. Jeremiah leaned over the eaves and looked again. He could make out that some piece of furniture, what he could not distinguish, was thrust against the wall of the hut. He saw two legs of turned mahogany, with brass castors at the ends that glistened in the moonlight. They were about four feet and a half apart, and supported what might be a table or secretaire. The rushing water drove these legs against the wall, and the castors ran and felt about the bricks as groping for a weak joint where they might knock a hole through. Then, all at once, the legs drew or fell back, and as they did so the upper portion of the piece of furniture opened and disclosed white and black teeth, in fact, revealed a keyboard. This was but for a moment, then the instrument was heaved up by a wave, the lid closed over

the keys, and the two brass-armed legs were again impelled against the fragile wall.

It is hardly to be wondered at that the ancients attributed living souls to streams and torrents, or peopled their waves with mischievous nixes, for they act at times in a manner that seems fraught with intelligence. It was so now. Here was this hut, an obstruction to the flood, feeble in itself, yet capable of resisting its first impetus, and likely to defy it altogether. The water alone could not dissolve it, so it had called other means and engines of destruction to its aid. At first, in a careless, thoughtless fashion, it had thrown a dead pig against it, then the corpse of a woman weighted with her dead babe; and now, having cast these away as unprofitable tools, it brought up, at great labour—a cottage piano. A piano is perhaps the heaviest and most cumbrous piece of furniture that the flood could have selected, and, on the whole, the best adapted to serve its purpose, as the deceased pig was the least. What force it must have exerted to bring up this instrument, what judgment it must have employed in choosing it! And what malignity there was in the flood in its

persistent efforts to break down the frail substructure on which stood the two men ! The iron framework of the instrument in the wooden back was under water, the base with the pedals rested against the foot of the hut. The water driving at the piano thus lodged, partially heaved it, as though a shoulder had been submitted to the back of the instrument, and thus the feet were driven with sharp, impatient strokes against the bricks. Moreover, every time that the piano fell back, the lid over the keys also fell back, and the white line of keys laughed out in the moonlight. But whenever the wave heaved up the piano, then the lid fell over them. It was horrible to watch the piano labouring as a willing slave to batter down the wall, as it did so opening and shutting its mouth, as though alternately gasping for breath and then returning to its task with grim resolution.

The moon was now disentangled from cloud ; it shone with sharp brilliancy out of a wide tract of cold gray sky, and the light was reflected by the teeth of the keyboard every time they were disclosed. Hark ! The clock of Mergatroyd church struck three. The dawn would not break for two or three hours.

‘I say, art a minister?’ suddenly asked the man in a nightshirt and great-coat.

‘No; I am not,’ answered the manufacturer impatiently. ‘Never mind what I am. Help me to get rid of this confounded cottage-piano.’

‘There, there!’ exclaimed the man; ‘now thou’rt swearing when thou ought to be praying. Why dost’a wear a white tie and black claes if thou ba’nt a minister? Thou might as weel wear a blue ribbon and be a drunkard.’

Mr. Pennycomequick did not answer the fellow. The man was crouched in squatting posture on the roof, holding up one foot after another from the cold slates that numbed them. His nightshirt hung as a white fringe below his great-coat. To the eye of an entomologist, he might have been taken for a gigantic specimen of the Camberwell Beauty.

‘If thou’d ’a been a minister, I’d ’a sed nowt. As thou’rt not, I knaw by thy white necktie thou must ’a been awt to a dancing or a dining soirée. And it were all along of them soirées that the first Flood came. We knaws it fra’ Scriptur’, t’folkes were eatin’ and drinkin’. If they’d been drinkin’ water, it hed never

'a come. What was t'Flood sent for but to wash out alcohol? and it's same naaw.'

Mr. Pennycomequick paid no heed to the man; he was anxiously watching the effect produced by the feet of the piano on the walls.

'It was o' cause o' these things the world was destroyed in the time o' Noah, all but eight persons as wore the blue ribbon.'

Again the forelegs of the piano crashed against the bricks, and now dislodged them, so that the water tore through the opening made.

'There's Scriptur' for it,' pursued the fellow. 'Oh, I'm right! but my toes are mortal could. Don't we read that Noah and his family was saved by water? Peter, one, two, three, twenty—answer me that. That's a poser for thee—saved because they was teetotalers.'

At that moment part of the wall gave way, and some of the roof fell in.

'Our only chance is to reach the poplar-stump,' said Jeremiah. 'Come along with me.'

'Nay, not I,' answered the man. 'The ships o' Tarshish was saved because Jonah was cast overboard.'

Go, then, and I'll stay here and be safe. I'll no be any mair i' t' same box wi' an alcohol-drinker.'

He drew up his feet under him, and put his fingers into his mouth to warm them.

Mr. Pennycomequick did not delay to use persuasion. If the man was fool enough to stay, he must stay. He slipped off the top of the hut, and planted one foot on the piano, then the other; his only chance was to reach the broken poplar, scramble up it, and lodge in its branches till morning. To do this he must reach it by the broken top that at present was caught between the legs of the piano, so that the water brushed up over the twigs. Jeremiah sprang among the boughs, and tried to scramble along it. Probably his additional weight was all that was required to snap the remaining fibres that held the portions together, for hardly was Mr. Pennycomequick on it than the strands yielded, and down past the crumbling hut rushed the tree-top, laden with its living burden, entangled, laced about with the whip-like branches, and as he passed he saw the frail structure dissolve like a lump of sugar in boiling water and disappear.

CHAPTER VII.

TAKING POSSESSION.

THE valley of the Keld for many miles above and below Mergatroyd presented a piteous spectacle when day dawned. The water had abated, but was not drained away. The fields were still submerged. Factories stood as stranded hulls amidst shallow lagoons, and were inaccessible, their fires extinguished, their mechanism arrested, their stores spoiled. The houses in the 'folds' were deserted, or were being cleared of their inhabitants* From the windows of some of these houses men and women were leaning and shouting for help. They had been caught by the

* For the enlightenment of the uninitiated it will be as well to describe a fold. About some mills are yards, and the enclosing walls of these yards form the backs of cottages facing inwards on the mill, which are occupied by operatives working in the factory.

water, which invaded the lower story, locally called the 'ha'ase,' when asleep in the bedrooms overhead, and now, hungry and cold and imprisoned, they clamoured for release. Boats were scarce. Such as had been possessed by manufacturers and others had been kept by the river, and these had been broken from their moorings and carried away. Rafts were extemporized out of doors and planks; and as the water was shallow and still in the folds, they served better than keels. One old woman had got into a 'peggy' tub and launched herself in it, to get stranded in the midst of a wide expanse of water, and from her vessel she screamed to be helped, and dared not venture to move lest she should upset her tub and be shot out.

Not many lives, apparently, had been lost in the parish of Mergatroyd. Mr. Pennycomequick was missing, and the man at the locks with his wife had not been seen, and their cottage was still inaccessible. But great mischief had been wrought by the water. Not only had the stores in the mills been damaged, and the machinery injured by water and grit getting into it, and boilers exploded by the shock, but also

because the swirl of the torrent had disturbed the subsoil of gravel and undermined the walls. Fissures formed with explosions like the report of guns; one chimney that had leaned before was now so inclined and overbalanced that its fall was inevitable, and was hourly expected.

All the gas jets fed from the main that descended into the valley were extinguished, and it was apparent that the rush of water had ploughed up the ground to the depths of the main, and had ruptured it. Walls that had run across the direction of the stream had been thrown over; the communication between the two sides of the valley was interrupted. It was uncertain whether the bridge was still in existence. The railway had been overflowed, and the traffic stopped. The canal banks and locks had suffered so severely that it would be useless for the barges for many months.

Tidings arrived during the day from the upper portion of the valley, and it appeared that the destruction of life and property had been greatest where the wave burst out from between the confining hills, before it had space in which to spread, and in spreading to distribute its force. Heartrending accounts came in,

some true, some exaggerated, some false, but all believed.

That night of terror and ruin did not see the roll of death made up. Such catastrophes have far-reaching effects. The wet, the exposure, the shock, were sure to produce after-sickness and succeeding mortality.

With ready hospitality, the parsonage, the inns, the houses of the well-to-do, were thrown open to receive those temporarily homeless, and food, warmth and clothing were forced upon them. But such as were received felt that they could not protract their stay and burden unduly their hosts, and insisted on returning prematurely to their sodden houses, there to contract rheumatic fevers and inflammations.

Twenty years ago, the author of this story wrote an account of such a disaster in a novel, the first on which he essayed his pen. Time has rolled away, and like the flood, has buried much ; and amongst the things it has swept off and sunk in oblivion is that book. Probably not a dozen copies of it exist. He may now be permitted to repeat what was there written, when the impression produced by the cataclysm was fresh

and vivid ; and let not the rare possessor of the lost novel charge him with plagiarism if he repeats something of his former description.

Near the spot where the Keld left the hills had stood a public-house called the Horse and Jockey. The full violence of the descending wave fell on it and effaced it utterly. The innkeeper's body was never found ; the child's cradle, with the child in it, had gone down the stream, kept from overbalancing by the kitchen cat, and so escaped destruction. The beer casks floated ashore some miles down, were never claimed, and were tapped and drunk dry by some roughs. The sign of Horse and Jockey came to land twenty miles away, unhurt ; it was the most worthless article the house had possessed. About a mile and a half above Mergatroyd was a row of new cottages, lately erected on money borrowed from a building society. They were of staring red brick, with sandstone heads to doors and windows ; the flood carried away three out of the four.

In the first lived a respectable wool-picker with wife and children, all Wesleyans. He and his wife and child were swept from life in a moment, and supplied

the preacher at their chapel with a topic for his next Sunday's discourse.

In the second lived a widow, who sold 'spice,' that is to say, sweets, together with sundry articles in the grocery line ; a mighty woman, rotund and red, with a laugh and a joke for everyone ; a useful woman to mothers in their troubles, and to children with the toothache, whooping cough, and other maladies. Black bottle and peppermint drops, Mother Bunch's syrup, soothing powders, porous plasters, embrocations, and heal-alls various, and of various degrees of mischievousness, were her specifics, and when the doses were nasty her lemon-drops and sugar-candy were freely given to cleanse the mouth of the taste of medicine. Now, she was gone down the river, her lollipops dissolved, her medicines dispersed. Away she had gone, floundering and spluttering, till her lungs were filled with the fluid she involuntarily imbibed, and then she sank and was caught among some sunken tree-snags, and her body was afterwards recovered from among them.

In the third cottage resided a musical shoemaker, a man with one love, and that the love of his bass viol.

A wiry, solemn man, greatly in request at all concerts, able to conduct a band, or take almost any instrument himself, but loving best—a viol.

Now, he was gone, and grit had been washed into the sacred case of the cherished instrument, ruined along with its master.

In the last cottage of the row lived a drunken, good-for-nothing fellow, who did odd jobs of work ; a fellow who had driven his own wife with her bairns from the house, and lived with another woman, as intemperate as himself, and with a mouth as foul as his own. This house and those within were spared.

‘Well, now,’ said an elder to the preacher, after the sermon at Providence Chapel next Sunday, ‘ah, did think thou wer’t boun’ to justify the ways o’ Providence.’

‘So I would if I could,’ answered the preacher, ‘but they b’aint justifiable.’

Where the folds and fields were not too deep in water, lads waded, collecting various articles that had drifted no one knew whence. Some oranges lodged in a corner were greedily secured and sucked. One man ran about displaying a laced lady’s boot at the

end of a walking-stick, which boot had been carried into his kitchen, and was useless unless he could discover the fellow. There was much merriment in spite of disaster. Yorkshire folk must laugh whatever happens, and jokes were bandied to and fro between those who rowed and waded and those who were prisoners in their upper chambers.

The pariahs of society were alive to their opportunities, and were descending the stream, claiming everything of value that was found as being their own lost property. In many cases their claims were allowed ; in others the finder of some article, rather than surrender it to a man whom he suspected, would cast it back into the water and bid him go further to recover it.

A higher type of pariah started subscriptions for the sufferers, and took many a toll on the sums accumulated for the purpose of relieving the distress.

What had become of Mr. Pennycomequick ? That was the question in every mouth in Mergatroyd. Salome knew that he had left the house just after midnight to take a walk by the canal, and the watchman had seen him a little later on the towpath.

Since then he had not been seen at all. It was probable that, hearing the alarm signals, he might have taken refuge somewhere ; but where ? That depended on where he was when the alarm was given. If he had ascended the canal he might have made his way into Mitchell's mill ; that was a hope soon dispelled, for news came that he had not been seen there. If he had descended the canal it was inconceivable that he could have escaped, as there was no place of refuge to which he could have flown.

Mrs. Sidebottom had not a shadow of doubt that Jeremiah was dead. Not dead ! Fiddlesticks ! Of course he was dead. She acted on this conviction. She moved into her half-brother's house. It would not do, she argued, to leave it unprotected to be pillaged by those Cusworths. A death demoralized a house. It was like the fall of a general, all order, respect for property, sense of duty, ceased. Lambert should remain at home, where he had his comforts, his own room, and his clothes. There was no necessity for his moving.

‘ Besides,’ said Mrs. Sidebottom, ‘ I could never trust a man, especially with women. Talk of men

as lords of creation ! Why, they are wheedled and humbugged by women with the greatest facility. If Lambert were here, the Cusworths, the maids, would sack the house under his nose, and he perceive nothing. I know how it was when I was newly married. Then, if anything went wrong among my domestics I sent Sidebottom down the kitchen-stairs to them. He returned crestfallen and penitent, convinced that he had wrongfully accused them, and that he was himself, in some obscure manner, to blame.'

Mrs. Sidebottom gave orders that her brother's room should be made ready for her.

'Uncle Jeremiah's room, mother !' exclaimed Lambert, in astonishment.

'Of course,' answered she. 'I am not going to leave that unwatched ; why, that is the focus and centre of everything. What do I care if they steal the sugar, and pull some of the French plums out of the bag in the store-closet ? I must sit at my post, keep my hand on the strong box and the bureau.'

'But suppose Uncle Jeremiah were to return ?'

'He won't return. He cannot. He is drowned.'

'But the body has not been recovered.'

‘Nor will it be ; it has been washed down into the ocean.’

‘Rather you than I sleep in his room,’ said Lambert.

After a slight hesitation Mrs. Sidebottom said, in a low, confiding tone, ‘I have found his keys. He left them in his dress-coat pocket. Now you see the necessity there is for me to be on the spot. I must have a search for the will.’ Then she drew a long breath, and said, ‘Now, Lamb, there is some chance of my heart’s desire being accomplished. You will be able to drop one of your *n*’s.’

‘Drop what, mother?’

‘Drop one of the *n*’s in the spelling of your name. I have never liked the double *n* in Pennycomequick. It will seem more distinguished to spell the name with one *n*.’

The captain yawned and walked to the door.

‘That is all one to me. I don’t suppose that one *n* will bring me more money than two. By the way, have you written to Philip?’

‘Philip!’ echoed Mrs. Sidebottom. ‘Of course not. This is no concern of his. If he grumbles, we can say that we hoped against hope, and did not like to

summon him till we were sure poor Jeremiah was no more. No, Lamb, we do not want Philip here, and if he comes he will find nothing to his advantage. Jeremiah very properly would not forgive his father, and he set us all an example, for in this nineteenth century we are all too disposed to leniency. I shall certainly not write to Philip.'

'I beg your pardon,' said Salome, who at this juncture appeared at the door. 'Were you mentioning Mr. Philip Pennycomequick?'

'Yes, I was,' answered Mrs. Sidebottom shortly.

Salome stood in the doorway, pale, with dark hollows about her eyes, and looking worn and harassed. She had been up and about all the night and following day.

'Were you speaking about sending for Mr. Philip Pennycomequick?' she asked.

'We were mentioning him; hardly yet considering about sending for him,' said Mrs. Sidebottom.

'Because,' said Salome, 'I have telegraphed for him. I thought he ought to be here.'

CHAPTER VIII.

IN ONE COMPARTMENT.

IN a second-class carriage on the Midland line sat a gentleman and a lady opposite each other. He was a tall man, and was dressed in a dark suit with a black tie. His face had that set controlled look which denotes self-restraint and reserve. The lips were thin and closed, and the cast of the features was stern. The eyes, large and hazel, were the only apparently expressive features he possessed. There is nothing that so radically distinguishes those who belong to the upper and cultured classes from such as move in the lower walks of life as this restraint of the facial muscles. It is not the roughness of the hand that marks off the manual worker from the man who walks in the primrose path of ease, but the cast of face, and that is due in the latter to the constant

inexorable enforcement of self-control. In the complexity of social life it is not tolerable that the face should be the index of the mind. Social intercourse demands disguise, forbids frankness, which it resents as brusquerie, and the child from infancy is taught to acquire a mastery over expression. As the delicate hand-artificer has to obtain complete control over every nerve of his hand, so as to make no slurs or shakes, so also has the man admitted into the social guild to hold every muscle of his face in rigid discipline. This is specially the case with the priest and the lawyer and the doctor. Conceive what a hitch would ensue in conversation should the lady of the house allow a visitor to discern in the countenance that she was unwelcome, or for a man of taste to allow his contempt to transpire when shown by an amateur his artistic failures, or for the host to wince when an incautious guest has exposed the family skeleton! It is said that the late Lady Beaconsfield endured her finger to be jammed in the carriage-door without wince or cry, and continued listening or pretending to listen to her husband's conversation whilst driving to the House. All members of the cultured classes

are similarly trained to smile and not change colour, to listen, perhaps to sing, when pinched and crushed and trodden on and in torture. Would a priest be endured in his parish if he did not receive every insult with a smile, or a barrister gain his cause if he suffered his face to proclaim his disbelief in its justice, or a doctor keep his patients if his countenance revealed what he thought of their complaints ?

If we turn over the Holbein collection of portraits of the Court of Henry VIII. we see among princes and nobles the same faces that we find now in farm-houses and factories. The Wars of the Roses had dissolved all restraints, and men of the first Tudor reigns were the undisciplined children of an age of domestic anarchy. But it was otherwise later. The portraits of Van Dyck and Lely show us gentlemen and ladies of perfect dignity and self-restraint.

What is also remarkable is that each age in the past seems to have had its typical cast of countenance and form of expression. The cavaliers of Charles I. have their special characteristics that distinguish them as much from the courtiers of Elizabeth as from those of Charles II. With Queen Anne another phase of

portraiture set in, because the faces were different, and again in the Hanoverian period how unlike were the gentlemen of the Regency from those of the first Georges ! Difference in dress does not explain this difference of face. The men and women in each epoch had their distinct mode of thought, fashion in morals and manners, and the face accommodated itself to these.

And at the present day that which cleaves class from class is the mode of thought in each, the rule of association that governs intercourse in their several planes ; and these affect the character of face in each, so that the classes are distinguished by their countenances as they were by ages in the past.

When collier Jack calls bargee Jim a blackguard, Jim replies with a curse on the collier's eyes, which he damns to perdition. But if collier Jack says the same thing to gentleman Percy, the latter raises his hat, bows, and passes on.

Education, if complete, does not merely sharpen the intellect and refine the manners, but it gives such a complete polish that affronts do not dint or adhere ; they glide off instead, leaving no perceptible trace of

impact. To the outward appearance, Christianity and culture produce an identical result, but only in outward appearance, for the former teaches the control of the emotions, whereas the latter merely forbids their expression.

The face of the gentleman who sat opposite this lady in the carriage was an intelligent, even clever face, but was somewhat hard. He looked at his companion once when he entered the carriage, hesitating whether to enter, and then glanced round to see whether there was another passenger in the compartment before he took a seat. There was at the time an elderly gentleman in the carriage, and this decided him to set his valise and rugs on the seat, and finally to take his place in the corner. If he had not seen that elderly man, with the repugnance single gentlemen so generally entertain against being shut in with a lady unattended, especially if young and pretty, he would have gone elsewhere. Where the carcase is there will the vultures gather. That is inevitable ; but no sane dromedary will voluntarily cast himself into a cage with vultures.

The old gentleman left after a couple of stages, and

then, for the rest of the journey, these two were enclosed together. As the man left, Philip looked out after him, with intent to descend, remove his baggage, and enter the next compartment, before or behind ; but saw that one was full of sailor boys romping, and the other with a family that numbered among it a wailing baby. He therefore drew back, with discontent at heart, and all his quills ready to bristle at the smallest attempt of the lady to draw him into conversation.

The train was hardly in movement before that attempt was made.

‘ You are quite welcome to use my footwarmer,’ she said.

‘ Thank you, my feet are not cold,’ was the ungracious reply.

‘ I have had it changed twice since I left town,’ she pursued, ‘ so that it is quite hot. The porters have been remarkably civil, and the guard looks in occasionally to see that I am comfortable.’

‘ In expectation of a tip,’ thought the gentleman, but he said nothing.

‘ The French are believed to be the politest people

in the world,' continued the lady, not yet discouraged, 'but I must say that the English railway porter is far in advance of the French one. On a foreign line you are treated as a vagabond, on the English as a guest.'

Still he said nothing. The lady cast an almost appealing glance at him. She had travelled a long way for a great many hours, and was weary of her own company. She longed for a little conversation.

'I cannot read in the train,' she said plaintively, 'it makes me giddy, and—I started yesterday from home.'

'In-deed,' said he in dislocated syllables. He quite understood that a hint had been conveyed to him, but he was an armadillo against hints.

The pretty young lady had not opened the conversation, if that can be called conversation which is one-sided, without having observed the young man's face; and satisfied herself that there was no more impropriety in her talking to one of so staid an air than if he had been a clergyman.

'What a bear this man is!' she thought.

He on his side said to himself, 'A forward missie!

I wish I were in a smoking-carriage, though I detest the smell of tobacco.'

Pretty—uncommonly pretty the little lady was, with perfectly made clothes. The fit of the gown and the style of the bonnet proclaimed French make. She had lovely golden-red hair, large brown eyes, and a face of transparent clearness, with two somewhat hectic fire-spots in her cheeks. Her charming little mouth was now quivering with pitiful vexation.

A quarter of an hour elapsed without another word being spoken, and the gentleman was satisfied that his companion had accepted the rebuff he had administered, when she broke forth again with a remark.

'Oh, sir! excuse my seeming rudeness, but—you have been reading the newspaper, and I am on pins and needles to hear the news from France. It is true that I have just crossed the Channel from that dear and suffering—but heroic country; I am, however, very ignorant of the news. Unfortunately our journals are not implicitly to be relied on. The French are such a patriotic people that they cannot bring themselves to write and print a word that tells of humilia-

tion and loss to their country. It is very natural, very noble—but inconvenient. That superb Faidherbe—I do trust he has succeeded in crushing the enemy.'

'He has been utterly routed.'

'Oh dear! Oh dear!' the little lady was plunged into real distress. 'This news was kept from me. That was why I was hurried away. I wanted to bring my nieces with me, the Demoiselles Labarte, but they clung to their mother and would not leave her. It was magnificent.' Then, after a sigh, 'Now, surely England will intervene.'

The gentleman shook his head.

'It is cruel. Surely one sister should fly to the assistance of the other.'

'The English nation is sister to the German.'

'Oh, how can you say so? William the Conqueror came from France.'

'From Normandy, which was not at the time and for long after considered a part of France.'

Then the gentleman, feeling he had been inveigled into saying more than he intended, looked out of the window.

Presently he heard a sob. The girl was crying. He took no notice of her trouble. He had made up his mind that she was a coquette, and he was steeled against her various tricks to attract attention and enlist sympathy. He would neither smile when she laughed, nor drop his mouth when she wept. His lips closed somewhat tighter, and his brows contracted slightly. He had noticed throughout the journey the petty attempts made by this girl to draw notice to herself—the shifting of her shawls, the opening and shutting of her valise, the plaintive sighs, the tapping of the impatient feet on the footwarmer. Though he had studiously kept his eyes turned from her, nothing she had done had escaped him, and all went to confirm the prejudice with which he was inclined to regard her from the moment of his entering the carriage. He rose from his place and moved to the further end of the compartment.

‘I beg your pardon,’ said the young lady, ‘I trust I have not disturbed you. You must excuse me, I am unhappy.’

‘Quite so, and I would not for the world trespass on your grief.’

‘I have a husband fighting under the Tricouleur, and I am very anxious about him.’

The gentleman made a slight acknowledgment with his head, which said unmistakably that he invited no further confidences.

This she accepted, and turned her face to look out of the opposite window.

At that moment the brake was put on, and sent a thrill through the carriage. Presently the train stopped. The face of the guard appeared at the window, and the little lady at once lowered the glass.

‘How are you getting on, miss?’

‘Very well, I thank you ; but you must not call me miss ; I am a married woman. I have left my husband in France fighting like a lion, and I am sent away because the Prussians are robbing and burning and murdering wherever they go. I know a lady near Nogent from whose chateau they carried off an ormolu clock.’ How unnecessary it was for her to enter into these details to the guard, thought the gentleman. He could not understand how a poor little heart full of trouble would long to pour itself out ; how that

certain natures can no more exist without sympathy than can plants without water.

‘Don’t you think, guard, that the English Government ought to interfere?’

‘Well, ma’am, that depends on how it would affect traffic—on the Midland. Where are you going to, if I may ask?’

‘Mergatroyd.’

‘There has been a flood, and the embankment of the railway has been washed away. For a day there has not been any passing over the lines, and now we are ordered to go along uncommon leisurely.’

‘But oh! guard, there is, I trust, no danger.’

‘No, ma’am, none in the least; I’ll take care that you come by no hurt. The worst that can happen is that we shall be delayed, and perhaps not be able to proceed the whole way in the same train. But rely on me, ma’am, I’ll see to you.’

‘Oh, guard, would you—would you mind? I have here a little bottle of nice Saint Julien, and I have not been able to touch it myself. Would you mind taking it? Also, here—here, under the bottle.’

She slipped some money into his hand.

The guard's red face beamed broad and benignant. He slipped the money into his waistcoat pocket, the bottle he stowed away elsewhere ; then thrusting his head inside he said confidentially, ' Never fear. I'll make it all right for you, ma'am.'

When the lady, who was none other than Janet, the twin sister of Salome, mentioned Mergatroyd as her destination, the eyebrows of her fellow-passenger were slightly lifted. He was looking out of the opposite window to that at which she conversed with the guard. Now he knew that he would not be rid of his companion for the rest of the journey, for he also was on his way to Mergatroyd. There was but a single subject of comfort to him, that the distance to Mergatroyd was no longer great, and the time taken over it, in spite of the hint of the guard, which he discounted, could not be great either.

The short November day had closed in ; and the remainder of the journey would be taken in the dark. The lamps had not yet been lighted in the carriage. To the west he could see through the window the brown light of the set day, the last rays of a wintry sun arrested by factory smoke. The gentleman was uneasy.

If the dromedary will not voluntarily enter the cage of the vulture, he will not remain in it in darkness with her without tremors.

‘When do you think, sir, that I shall reach Mergatroyd?’ asked the young lady.

‘That is a question impossible for me to answer,’ replied the gentleman; ‘as you heard from your friend’—he emphasized this word and threw sarcasm into his expression—‘the guard, there are conditions, about which I know nothing, which will interfere with the punctuality of the train.’

Then he fumbled in his pocket, drew forth an orange-coloured envelope, from this took a scrap of pink paper, and by the expiring evening light read the telegraphic message in large pencil-marks.

‘Your uncle lost. Come at once. Salome.’

Salome!—who was Salome?

He replaced the paper in the envelope, which was addressed Philip Pennycomequick, care of Messrs. Pinch and Squeeze, Solicitors, Nottingham.

The message was a brief one—too brief to be intelligible.

Lost—how was Mr. Jeremiah Pennycomequick lost?

When the train drew up at a small station, the young man returned to the down side, by the lady, let down the glass and called the guard.

‘Here! what did you say about the flood? I have seen it mentioned in the paper, but I did not understand that it had been at Mergatroyd.’

‘It has been in the Keld Valley.’

‘And Mergatroyd is in that valley?’

‘Where else would you have it, sir?’

‘But—according to my paper the great damage was done at Holme Bridge.’

‘Well, so it was; and Holme Bridge is above Mergatroyd.’

Philip Pennycomequick drew up the glass again. Now he understood. He had never been to Mergatroyd in his life, and knew nothing about its situation. He had skimmed the account of the flood in his paper, but had given most of his attention to the narrative of the war in France. It had not occurred to him to connect the ‘loss’ of his uncle with the inundation. He had supposed the word ‘loss’ was an euphemism for ‘going off his head.’ Elderly gentlemen do not get lost in England, least of all in one of its most

densely populated districts, as if they were in the backwoods or prairies of America.

But who sent him the telegram? He had no relative of the name of Salome. His aunt, Mrs. Sidebottom, who was now resident, as he knew, at Mergatroyd, was named Louisa, and she was the person who, he supposed, would have wired to him if anything serious had occurred requiring his presence.

His companion was going to Mergatroyd, and probably knew people there. If he asked her whether she was aware of a person of the peculiar Christian name of Salome at that place, it was possible she might inform him. But he was too reserved and proud to ask. He would not afford this flighty piece of goods an excuse for opening conversation with him. In half an hour he would be at his destination, and would then have his perplexity cleared.

The train proceeded leisurely. Philip's feet were now very cold, and he would have been grateful for the warmer, but could not now ask for permission to use what he had formerly rejected.

As the train proceeded the engine whistled.

There were men working on the line; at intervals

coal fires were blazing and smoking in braziers. The train further slackened speed. Philip Pennycomequick could see that there was much water covering the country. The train had now entered the Valley of the Keld, and was ascending it.

What a nuisance it would be were he stopped and obliged to tarry for some hours till the road was repaired, tarry in cold and darkness, without a lamp in his carriage, caged in with that pretty, coquettish, dangerous minx, and with no third party present to serve as his protector.

The train came to a standstill. The young lady was uneasy. She lowered the glass and leaned out; and looked along the line at the flaming fires, the half-illuminated navvies, the steam trailing away and mingling with the smoke, the fog that gathered over the inundated fields. A raw wind blew in at the open window.

Then up came the guard, sharply turned the handle and threw open the door. 'Everyone get out. The train can go no further.'

All the passengers were obliged to descend, dragging with them their rugs and bags, their cloaks, umbrellas,

novels, buns and oranges—all the piles of *impedimenta* with which travellers encumber themselves on a journey, trusting to the prompt assistance of mercenary porters.

But on this night, away from any station, there were no porters. The descent from the carriage was difficult and dangerous. It was like clambering down a ladder of which some of the rungs were broken. It was rendered doubly difficult by the darkness in which it had to be effected, and the difficulty was quadrupled by the passengers having to scramble down burdened with their effects. It was not accordingly performed in silence, but with screams from women who lost their footing, and curses and abuses launched against the Midland from the men.

Mr. Philip was obliged by common humanity to assist the young lady out of the carriage, and to collect and help to carry her manifold goods; for the civil guard was too deeply engaged to attend to her. He had received his fee, and was, therefore, naturally lavishing his attention on others, in an expectant mood.

Mr. Philip Pennycomequick somewhat ungraciously

advised the companion forced on his protection to follow him. He engaged to see her across the dangerous piece of road and return for those of her wraps and parcels which he and she were together unable to transport to the train awaiting them beyond the faulty portion of the line.

The walk was most uncomfortable. It was properly not a walk but a continuous stumble. To step in the dark from sleeper to sleeper was not easy, and the flicker of the coal fires dazzled and confused rather than assisted the sight. The wind, moreover, carried the dense smoke in volumes across the line, suddenly enveloping and half stifling, but wholly blinding for the moment, the unhappy, bewildered flounders who passed through it. In front glared the two red lights of an engine that waited with carriages to receive the dislodged passengers.

‘You must take my arm,’ said Mr. Philip to his companion. ‘This is really dreadful. One old lady has, I believe, dislocated her ankle. I hope she will make a claim on the company.’

‘Oh, dear! And Salome! — what will she say?’

‘Salome?’

‘Yes—my sister, my twin-sister.’

When Philip Pennycomequick did finally reach his destination, it was with a mind that prejudged Salome, and was prejudiced against her.

CHAPTER IX.

ARRIVAL.

‘WHAT—no cabs? No cabs?’ asked Philip Pennycomequick, on reaching the Mergatroyd Station. ‘What a place this must be to call itself a town and have no convenience for those who arrive at it, to transport them to their destinations. Can one hire a wheelbarrow?’ Philip was, as may be seen, testy. The train had not deposited him at the station till past seven, instead of four-eighteen, when due. He had been thrown into involuntary association with a young lady, whom he had set down to belong to a category of females that are to be kept at a distance—that is, those who, as he contemptuously described them, run after a hearth-brush because it wears whiskers. He misjudged Janet Baynes, as men of a suspicious temper are liable to misjudge simple and

frank natures. There are men who, the more forward a woman is, so much the more do they recoil into their shells, to glower out of them at those who approach them, like a mastiff from its kennel, with a growl and a display of teeth.

Who this woman was with whom he had been thrown, Philip only knew from what she had told him and the guard. He was aware that she was the sister of his correspondent Salome, but he was ignorant as before who Salome was, less only the fact that she must be young, because the twin-sister of his fellow-passenger. If like her—and twins are usually alike—she must be pretty, and as mental characteristics follow the features, like her coquettish, and ready to make love—as Philip put it—to the hearth-brush because of its whiskers.

At the station he had reckoned on finding a cab and driving to his destination, whilst his companion went off in another. But to his vexation he found that there were no cabs. He must engage a porter to carry his traps on a truck. He resolved to go first of all to his uncle's house and inquire whether he was lost in the flood and if he had been heard of since the

telegram was despatched. Then he would put up for the night at the inn, and his future movements would be regulated by the information he received.

‘By the way,’ said he to the porter, ‘I suppose you have a decent hotel in the place, though it is deficient in cabs.’

‘There are three inns,’ answered the man, ‘but all full as an excursion train on Good Friday. The poor folks that ha’ been turned o’t haase by t’ water ha’ been ta’en into ’em. Where art ’a going, sir?’

‘To the house of Mr. Pennycomequick,’ answered Philip.

‘Right you are,’ said the porter, ‘Mrs. Baynes is also boun’ to t’same, and I can take t’whole bag-o’-tricks on one barrow.’

Philip turned to Janet Baynes with an impatient gesture, which with all his self-control he was unable to repress, and said :

‘You are going to Mr. Pennycomequick’s, I understand, madam.’

There was no avoiding it. The tiresome association could not be dissolved at once, it threatened to continue.

‘Yes,’ answered Janet, ‘I spent all my life there till I married, and my mother and sister are there now.’

‘Not relations of Mr. Pennycomequick?’

‘Oh dear no. He has been like a father to us, because our own father was killed by an accident in his service. That was a long time ago, I cannot remember the circumstance. Ever since then we have lived in the house. We always call Mr. Pennycomequick our uncle, but he is no real relative.’

Philip strode forward, ahead of the porter; from the station the road ascended at a steep gradient, and the man came on slowly with the united luggage. Janet quickened her pace, and came up beside Philip.

It was like being beset by a fly in summer.

‘Are you going to Mr. Pennycomequick’s?’ asked Janet, panting. She was a little out of breath with walking to keep up with her companion.

‘Yes.’

‘I am not strong. My breath goes if I hurry, especially in going up-hill.’

‘Then, madam, let me entreat you to spare your lungs and relax your pace.’

‘ But then—we shall be separated, and we are going to the same house. Would you mind going just a wee bit slower ?’

Philip complied without a word.

He questioned for a moment whether he should inform his fellow-passenger of the news that the uncle was lost. But he reflected that he knew nothing for certain. The message he had received could hardly have been couched in vaguer terms. It was quite possible that his explanation of it was false ; it was also not at all improbable that the alarm given was premature. If Salome were like the young scatter-brain walking at his side, she would be precisely the person to cry ‘ Wolf !’ at the first alarm. He might have inquired of the porter whether Mr. Pennycomequick had met with an accident, or whether anything had occurred at his house ; but he preferred to wait, partly because he was too proud to inquire of a porter, and partly because he was given no opportunity to questioning him out of hearing of his companion.

‘ Are you going to stay at uncle’s ?’ asked Janet.

‘ I really am unable to answer that question.’

‘But, as you have heard, all the inns are full. Have you any friends in Mergatroyd?’

‘Relations—not friends.’

‘What a delightful thing it must be to have plenty of relations! Salome and I have none. We were quite alone in the world, except for mother. Now I have, of course, all my husband’s kindred, but Salome has no one.’

There was no shaking this girl off. She stuck to him as a burr. In all probability he would be housed at his uncle’s that night, and so he would be brought into further contact with this person. She herself was eminently distasteful to him—but a sister unmarried!—Philip resolved to redouble his testy manner towards her. He would return to Nottingham on the morrow, unless absolutely compelled by circumstances to remain.

There was—there always had been—a vein of suspicion, breeding reserve of manner, in the Pennycomequick family. It was found chiefly in the men—in the women, that is, in Mrs. Sidebottom, it took a different form. As forces are co-related, so are tempers. It chilled their manner, it made

them inapt to form friendships, and uncongenial in society.

Uncle Jeremiah had it, and that strongly. Towards his own kin he had never relaxed. The conduct of neither sister nor brother had been such as to inspire confidence. To the last he was hard, icy and suspicious towards them. But the warm breath of the little children had melted the frost in his domestic relations, and their conspicuous guilelessness had disarmed his suspicions. To them he had been a very different man to what he had appeared to others. Philip's father had behaved foolishly, withdrawn his money from the firm, and in a fit of credulity had allowed himself to be swindled out of it by a smooth-tongued impostor, Schofield. That loss had reduced him to poverty, and had soured him. Thenceforth, the Pennycomequick characteristics which had been in abeyance in Nicholas ripened rapidly. Philip had learned from his father to regard the bulk of mankind as in league against the few, as characterized by self-seeking, and as unreliable in all that affected their own interests. Philip was aged thirty-four, but looked older than his years. The experiences he had passed

through had prematurely fixed the direction of his tendencies, and had warped his views of life. In photography, impressions made on the sensitive plate rapidly fade unless dipped in a solution which gives them permanency. So is it with the incidents of life ; pictures are formed in our brains and pass unnoticed, unregistered, till something occurs to fix them. The great misfortune which had befallen his father had acted as such a bath to Philip's mind, leaving on it the indelible impression of universal rascality. He could remember the comfort in which his childhood had been passed, and the grinding penury afterwards. Obligated to work for his livelihood, he had chosen the law, a profession ill calculated to counteract the tendency in him, inherent, and already declared, to regard all men as knaves or fools.

Nicholas's last years had been spent in useless repinings over his loss, in grumbling at his brother and sister for not coming to his aid, and in hatred of the man who had ruined him.

He had been too proud to appeal to his half-brother, and was angry with Jeremiah for not coming forward unsolicited to relieve him. Had he gone to his

brother, even written to him to express regret for his injudicious conduct, it is probable, nay, certain, that Jeremiah would have forgiven him ; but the false pride of Nicholas prevented him taking this step, and Jeremiah would not move to his assistance without it.

Thus a mutual misunderstanding kept the half-brothers apart, and embittered their minds against each other.

Mrs. Sidebottom had been of as little help to her brother as had Jeremiah. Mr. Sidebottom had, indeed, taken Philip into his office as a clerk, but no Sidebottom contributions came to relieve the necessities of Nicholas. His sister was profuse in regrets and apologies for not doing anything for him, always weighting these apologies with a lecture on his wrongdoing in withdrawing his money from the firm ; but she gave him nothing save empty words. Nicholas entertained but little love for his sister ; and Philip grew up with small respect for his aunt.

By the time that Philip had reached the Pennycomequick door he was in as unamiable a temper as he had ever been during the thirty-four years of his life. He was damp, hungry, cold. He more than

half believed that he had been brought to Mergatroyd on a fool's errand ; he did not know where he was to sleep that night, and what he would get to eat. The inns, as he had heard, were full ; no more trains would leave the station that night, owing to the condition of the line ; there was not a cab in Mergatroyd, so that he could escape from the place only on foot, and that without his baggage.

Moreover, he was in doubt with what face he could appear before his uncle, were Jeremiah at home. His uncle, whom he had only once seen, and that at his father's funeral, had on that occasion shown him not the smallest inclination to make his acquaintance. Would it not appear as if, on the first rumour or suspicion of disaster, he had rushed to the spot without decorum, to seize on his uncle's estate, and with no better excuse than a vague telegram received from an irresponsible girl.

'Here is the door,' said the porter. Janet ran up the steps with alacrity and knocked.

Mr. Pennycomequick's house was formal as himself, of red brick without ornament ; half-way up the hill, with its back to the road, and without even that

mellow charm which old red brick assumes in the country, for this was red begrimed with soot, on which not a lichen or patch of moss would grow. The ugly back was towards the street; the uglier face looked into a garden that ran down the slope to the valley bottom. There were two square-headed windows on one side of the door, two similar windows on the other side, over each an exactly similar window, and over the door one with a round head that doubtless lighted the staircase. Above these was another story similar, but the windows less tall. Who does not know this kind of house? They are scattered in hundreds of thousands over the face of England, and who, with a grain of taste, would not a thousand times rather snuggle into a thatched cottage, with windows broad and low, winking out from under the brown eaves? Not if one lived to the age of the Wandering Jew could one become attached to one of these gaunt, formal, dingy mansions. The door was opened in answer to the bell and knocker, and Philip, after paying the railway porter, requested him to wait five minutes till he ascertained whether he was to spend the night there or go in quest of a bed.

Then he entered the gas-lighted hall, to see his travelling comrade locked in the arms of her sister, a young girl of the same age and height and general appearance, with the same red-gold hair, and the same clear complexion, who was flushed with excitement at meeting Janet.

A pretty sight it was—those lovely twins clinging to each other in an ecstasy of delight, laughing, kissing, fondling each other, with the tears of exuberant pleasure streaming over their cheeks.

But Philip remained unmoved or contemptuous. He saw his Aunt Louisa and Captain Lambert on the stairs.

‘I know well what this bit of pantomime means,’ thought Philip. ‘The girls are showing off before two young men.’

‘What! Philip here!’ exclaimed Mrs. Sidebottom, who hastened down the stairs to greet her nephew. ‘Oh, Philip! how good of you to come! I made sure you would the moment you heard the news, and yet I was not sure but that you would shrink from it—as you were on such bad terms with your uncle. I am so glad you have arrived to assist us with your

professional advice. This is a sad, a very sad case.'

'Mr. Philip Pennycomequick!' exclaimed Salome disengaging herself from her sister's embrace and standing before the young man. She lifted her great searching eyes to his face and studied it, then dropped them, ashamed at her audacity, and perhaps a little disappointed at what she had seen; for the moment he came towards her he assumed his most uncompromising expression.

'I beg your pardon,' said he stiffly. 'Whom have I the honour——'

'I am Salome Cusworth, who telegraphed to you.'

He bowed haughtily. 'I am glad.'

Then Salome, abashed, caught her sister's hand, and said to Mrs. Sidebottom: 'Oh, please, let me take Janet away first—she knows nothing, and you must allow me to break the terrible news to her myself.'

She drew her sister aside, with her arm round her waist, into a room on the ground-floor, where she could tell her privately the great sorrow that had fallen on them.

Philip looked inquiringly after them, and when the

door had closed, said to his aunt: 'Who are they? What are they?'

'You may well ask,' said Mrs. Sidebottom. 'They are the petted and spoiled daughters of your uncle's housekeeper. He has brought them up beyond their station, and now they will be unfit to do anything when turned adrift.'

'But,' said Philip, 'one is married.'

'Oh yes, of course. She has caught her man. I know nothing of her husband, or how he was tackled. I dare say, however, he is respectable, but only a manufacturer.'

'And the unmarried sister is Salome.'

'Yes, an officious pert piece of goods.'

'Like her sister.'

'Now,' said Mrs. Sidebottom, 'what are you going to do? In this house you cannot well be accommodated. There are rooms—but everyone's head is turned, servants and all. No toast sent up at breakfast. Your best way will be to go to Lambert's quarters in my house. Here you would be amidst a party of tedious women——'

'I want to be as far as possible from those young

ladies,' said Philip. 'One has been in the train with me for many hours, and has worried me beyond endurance.'

'Certainly. Go with Lambert. In my house you will be in Liberty Hall, where you can smoke——'

'I never smoke.'

'And drink whisky and water.'

'I take nothing at night.'

'And talk over social scandals.'

'In which I have not the smallest interest.'

'Well, well, we dine in a quarter of an hour here. You will stay. No dressing, quite *en famille*. Fried soles, a joint and cutlets *à la tomato*.'

'Thank you. I accept ; for the inns, I learn, are quite full. I will give orders to the porter to take my traps over to your house, and then, perhaps, you will give me ten minutes to tell me what has happened to my uncle, for I am still in the dark respecting him.'

'So are we all,' said Lambert.

From the room into which Salome had drawn her sister, and which was the sitting-room of their invalided mother, could be heard the sobbing of Janet

and the broken accents of the old lady and Salome. There were tears in all their voices.

Then there flashed through the mind of Philip Pennycomequick the thought that, here without in the hall, were the sister and two nephews of the lost man, who had been as yet scarcely alluded to by them, but he had been told about what there was for dinner ; whereas, divided from them by a door were three persons unconnected with Uncle Jeremiah, who were moved by his death or disappearance as by that of a dear connection.

Philip, however, said nothing. He turned to the front door to speak to the porter, when a violent ring at the bell called his attention to another man who stood on the steps.

‘Beg pardon,’ said this man, ‘where is Miss Salome?’

‘I will call her,’ said Philip. ‘Who shall I say wants to speak to her?’

‘The night-watchman, Fanshawe.’

‘Oh, Mr. Fanshawe!’ exclaimed Mrs. Sidebottom, running through the hall to him, ‘has he been found?’

‘No such luck,’ was the answer.

Philip tapped at the door through which the girls had retreated, and Salome opened it. Her eyes were glittering with tears, and her cheeks were moist.

‘There is a fellow called Fanshawe wants a word with you,’ said Philip.

The girl advanced through the hall to the door.

‘Oh, miss!’ said the night-watchman, ‘some o’ us chaps aren’t content to let matters stand as they be. For sewer t’owd gen’lman be somewheer, and we’re boun’ to mak’ anither sarch. We thowt tha’d like to knaw.’

‘But—where?’

‘I’t canal.’

‘How?—By night?’

‘For sewer. Wi’ a loaf o’ cake and a can’l.’

CHAPTER X.

WITH A LOAF AND A CANDLE.

WITH a loaf and a candle !

We live in the oldest world, where men labour to do the simplest things in the most roundabout way, and to put whatever they come in contact with to purposes other than those intended. We have seen champagne bottles used as candlesticks, and a bonnet given to a cat to kitten in, and a preacher haranguing in a theatre, and a pugilist occupying a pulpit, women dressing and cutting their hair like men, and men affecting girlish ways ; members of Parliament exhibiting themselves as blackguards, and leaders of the people leading them to political suicide, as Jack the Giant-killer made Giant Gruff-me-gruff rip himself open. Those who have feet to walk on, affect standing on their heads, and those who have heads to reason with, think with their stomachs.

With a loaf and a candle !

Astronomers tell us that there are as many suns visible in the firmament as there are human beings in Great Britain—about thirty millions, and that each of these suns is presumably the centre of a system of worlds like our own, and perhaps peopled by beings of like calibre to ourselves. Let us say that each sun is given ten planets, that makes three hundred millions of worlds, having in them the same proportion of thoughtless, unreasoning beings as in this globe with which we are familiar. Who would have supposed that there was such a diffusion of silliness, wrongheadedness, and blunder brains diffused through space.

With a loaf and a candle !

It is the fashion to believe in evolution, to hold that mankind is developed through a long progression from something as inarticulate as frog spawn. And we believe it, because we see so much of this inchoate, inorganic spawn still taking the place of brain in the heads of humanity.

Men have grown and become vertebrate and have branched into members, but the spawn still lingers as it was in the cells of the skull.

With a loaf and a candle !

Full a score of in-the-main not unintelligent men were about to search for the body of their master with a loaf of cake and a candle.* How a loaf and a candle should conduce towards the finding the object they sought, it is not easy to see. What there was in the nature of the loaf or candle to make each appropriate to the purpose, not one of these in-the-main not unintelligent men asked.

The upper reach of the canal had drained itself away, but at the locks the rush of water had furrowed the bed, pent in as it had been between the walls, and had left deep pools. Below the locks the face of the land was flat, the fall slight, and there the canal was brimming, and much of the water that had overflowed still lay about in the fields. This portion of the Keld basin went by the name of the Fleet, which indicated a time, perhaps not remote, when it had been a waste of ooze and water channels, sometimes overflowed and sometimes dry.

The whole of the drained canal bed had been

* In Yorkshire, cake is white bread ; bread is oatcake—Haver-bread.

searched between the lock and the bridge that carried the road across the river and canal, a distance of three-quarters of a mile, but without success. The men who intended prosecuting the search in their own fashion were clustered below the shattered locks. But the gathering did not consist of men only. With them were some mill-girls from a factory on the slope that had not stopped, not having been affected by the flood. They wore scarlet or pink kerchiefs over their heads, pinned under the chin, and plain white pinafores to protect their dresses at their work from the oil, a custom as picturesque and becoming as convenient. These girls were there, because it was an unsuitable place for them—no other reason will suffice to explain their presence. But women, water and wind, will penetrate everywhere.

Mrs. Sidebottom and Salome were also on the canal bank. They had no faith in the experiment about to be tried, but each for different reasons thought it expedient to be present. Salome would not be away, so intense was her anxiety about the fate of Uncle Jeremiah, and Mrs. Sidebottom would be there so as not to seem indifferent. Janet, tired from her long

journey, and not strong, did not come out ; she remained with her mother. Philip and Lambert Pennycomequick were there as a duty ; a disagreeable and onerous duty the captain considered it, because it spoiled his dinner.

A loaf and a candle !

A good round loaf of baker's bread had a hole scooped out of it, and into this hole a tallow candle was thrust. The candle was lighted and sent adrift on the water of the canal.

The night was dark, the moon did not rise for another hour or more. All the mills in the valley were dark. Not only had they been brought to a standstill by the flood, but the main of the gas was broken. This was the cause of the eclipse likewise of the lamps on the road. The water had left the cottage of the lock-keeper, and the bodies of the dead man and his wife had been found and laid on the sodden bed. A yellow glimmer shone out of the window, for a candle burnt there, and a fire had been kindled. An old woman, a relation, driven from her home by the water, was sitting there, trying to coax a fire to keep in, in the wet and rusty grate, and

supplying herself with gin to keep out the chill from her bones.

The town on the hill flank twinkled with lights, and just beyond the ridge pulsated the auroral flicker from the distant foundries. The lamps on the railway shone green and red. Some of those engaged in the search bore lanterns.

The cluster on the embankment with the moving lights, the occasional flash over a red kerchief or a white pinafore and the reflections in the water, united to form a striking picture.

‘Si’ there,’ said one man, ‘t’leet’ (light) ‘be headin’ agin t’ stream.’

‘There’s no stream flowing,’ said another.

‘There owt ta be, and there is for sewer. T’can’l be gan’in up t’ course.’

‘Because t’ wind be blawing frae t’ east.’

It was true ; the loaf of bread which had been placed in the water, instead of taking a seaward direction with the natural fall of the current, was swimming slowly but perceptibly upwards. The yellow flame of the candle was turned towards the locks, showing in which direction the wind set, and explaining naturally

the phenomenon. The current was so slight that the wind acting on the loaf had power to overcome it.

‘Sho’s travellin’ upwards,’ said the first speaker.
‘Sho’s boun to seek him aht.’

Into the canal suddenly fell a mass of undermined bank, making a splash and sending the floating light, gyrating and dancing as the wavelets formed. One of the mill-girls, going too near the edge, had trodden on the loosened soil, and nearly fell in herself, provoking a laugh and a reprimand.

‘Mind what tha’rt about, lass,’ shouted one of the men.

‘If tha falls in I’m none bound to hug thee aht.’

‘I can crawl aht wi’out thy hugging, Bill,’ answered the girl promptly.

‘Eh!’ said another, ‘Effie, for sewer thou’rt not bawn to be drowned.’

Some byplay went on, a half romp, in the rear, between a young woolcomber and a girl reeler.

‘Na then,’ shouted the night-watch, ‘we’re none come aht for laikes’ (games), ‘and if you’re gan’ing to remain you must be quiet.’

The incongruity of their behaviour with the gravity

of the occasion struck the young people, and they desisted.

What had become of the refuge hut ?

Curiously enough, till this moment no one had noticed its disappearance, perhaps because of the completeness with which it had been effaced. No sooner had the stream penetrated to its interior than it had collapsed, and every brick and slate and rafter had been swept away from the platform it had occupied.

The policeman had joined the party, carrying a bull's-eye lantern.

One of the men had provided grappling-irons, always kept near the bridge, because accidents were not uncommon in the canal and the river ; drunken men fell in, children in play got pushed over, girls in paroxysms of despair threw themselves in.

The loaf with the light had now got above the spot where the bank had fallen in, and the ripple aided the wind in carrying it within the locks.

‘ Sho’s got an idee !’

‘ Wheer ? I’t crust or i’t crumb ?’

‘ Sho’s makin’ reet ahead for t’ deepest hoyle (hole) in all t’ canal.’

It was so, the loaf had entered within the walls.

Every now and then, on a ripple, the bread leaped and the flame wavered as a banner. The draught snuffed the glowing wick, and carried some of the red sparks away and extinguished them in the black water.

The searchers now congregated on the paved platform, and looked timorously yet inquisitively into the gulf where lay the pool dark as ink. The candle-flame faintly irradiated the enclosing walls, and painted a streak of fire on the surface of the water.

When thus enclosed, the movements of the loaf were such as to give colour to the superstition, for it careered in circles, then struck across the canal, went back as if disappointed in its quest, ran up the course, and then turned and went down the enclosed space, and finally came forth from between the walls. There it halted a moment, and danced and careened over, and righted itself again, as relaxing from its search, and tossing the flame in a defiant manner, as if it was disgusted with its work and resolved no longer to

prosecute the inquiry. But a minute later it came apparently to a better mind, the flame became steadier, it recommenced its gyrations, described a loop, and suddenly became stationary at a spot a little short of half way across the canal.

The strange conduct of the loaf was in reality caused by the currents and revolutions of the water, but as these were unperceived by those who looked on, they became impressed with the conviction that the loaf was really animated by a mysterious occult power that impelled it to fulfil the task allotted to it.

All now stood hushed for full five minutes, almost breathless, none stirring, every eye directed to the light, to see whether it would remain where it was, or recommence its wanderings.

Then the night-watch exclaimed :

‘ The moon !’

All turned to the east, and saw the orb rise red above a wooded hill. The darkness was at once sensibly relieved.

‘ Naw then !’ shouted Bill ; ‘ in wi’t irons, just at place wheer t’ can’l stands.’

The grapplers were cast in, and caught immediately

in some object near the surface. The men drew at the ropes, and the waters gurgled and were disturbed about the loaf, producing a broad commotion. The loaf leaped, turned over, and the light was extinguished. It had accomplished its task.

‘Whatever can’t be?’ asked one of the men. ‘Sho might be a coil (coal) barge sunk i’ t’ canal. Sho’s sae heavy.’

‘Stay,’ said the night-watch. ‘T’ water for sewer ain’t deep here, nobbut up to t’ armpits. Wha’tiver it be, ’tis this at ha’ caught and held t’ cake. Ah fancy t’ top o’ t’ concarn is just belaw t’ surface. If some o’ you chaps’ll help, I’ll get in, and together we’ll hug it out.’

Two or three volunteered, and after much wading and splashing a cumbrous article was heaved out of the water, but not by three or four men, for several more, taunted by the mill-lasses, went in to the assistance of the first volunteers.

‘Why,’ rose in general exclamation, ‘sho’s a pi-ano!’

This discovery provoked a laugh, in which all shared.

‘How iver could a piano ha’ got there?’ was asked.

‘That beats a’,’ shouted another, ‘that t’ loaf and can’l shud tell where a piano lay drouded.’

‘T’ instrument ’ud sarve to produce a necessary accompaniment to some o’ thy songs, Joe.’

The moon had risen by this time sufficiently to transform the whole sheet of water into one of light.

The bell of Mergatroyd Church-tower began to toll for evensong. Suddenly the laughter, the jokes, the exclamations of wonder died away—for something was seen that had risen from the depths, disturbed by the commotion of the water and mud when the piano was extracted. And see! the loaf with its extinguished candle was swimming towards the object. It reached it; it capered about it; it ran round it; and then attached itself to it.

‘What was it?’

The glassy, silvery surface of the water was broken by it in several places.

Then there rushed by along the line a train, with the engine shrieking and shrieking continuously to give warning to workers on the embankment that it

was coming. And that shriek so wrought on the nerves of some of the girls present that they screamed also in sudden terror, for, though no one answered the question what that blot on the canal surface was, everyone knew.

All stood motionless again, and waiting till the scream of the train was lost, and then, in silence, two men waded into the water, reached the object, drew it after them to the bank, and with the assistance of others raised it and laid it on the towpath.

Then the group drew towards it, after a momentary hesitation and recoil, and the policeman passed the ray of his bull's-eye lantern up and down it.

The question could no longer be asked, 'What was it?'

It must now be put, 'Who is it?'

Yes—who? For the body just recovered was defaced almost past recognition.

'Whoever he may be,' said the policeman, 'we must find out by his cloas, for his face and head be that mashed and mutilated—'tis a pictur'. For cartain the piano must ha' fallen on him, that is, on his head, and left not a feature to recognise.'

‘And the clothing is queer,’ observed the night-watch.

It was so. The body recovered was partially naked, with bare legs and feet, and wore nothing more than a nightshirt and a great-coat.

‘Stand back,’ ordered the policeman. ‘Let Miss Cusworth come for’ard.’

And he stooped and spread his handkerchief over the face. There was no need for her to see that.

Salome stepped forward. She was shuddering, but spoke with composure, and not till she had thoroughly studied the corpse at her feet.

‘This cannot be Mr. Pennycomequick,’ she said; ‘he was dressed in a black suit. He had been out to dinner.’

‘I beg your pardon,’ said Mrs. Sidebottom, who had pushed forward; ‘he was not dressed. I went into the bedroom as soon as I knew he was lost, and found that his dress-clothes were there and the bed disturbed.’

The policeman, kneeling, examined the pockets. From that in the breast of the overcoat he drew forth a card-case, and held it close to the lantern.

Salome said immediately :

‘ That is Mr. Pennycomequick’s card-case.’

‘ And his cards are in it,’ added the policeman.

Salome looked again attentively at the body.

‘ That is Mr. Pennycomequick’s overcoat. I know it—but that cannot be Mr. Pennycomequick wearing it.’

Then, overcome with the horror of the scene, Salome shrank back.

The policeman had now extracted a letter from the pocket ; the address was blotted, but after a little examination could be made out, ‘ J. Pennycomequick, Esq., manufacturer, Mergatroyd.’

‘ It is strange that he should be without his boots,’ said the policeman.

‘ Not at all,’ said Mrs. Sidebottom. ‘ Anyone but a fool, as soon as he is in the water, kicks them off, as they fill and drag him down. I can swear to the identity—that is my brother. Remove the body to the house.’

CHAPTER XI.

EXPECTATION.

As Philip Pennycomequick came next day to the house of mourning—mourning, because three dress-makers were engaged in making it—he saw that all the blinds were down. In the hall he met Salome, who was there, evidently awaiting him. She looked ill and anxious, and her eyes were bright with a feverish lustre. She had not slept for two nights.

The extraordinary delicacy of her complexion gave her a look as of the finest porcelain, a transparency through which her doubting, disturbed and eager spirit was visible. Her pallor contrasted startlingly at this time with the gorgeous tone of her luxuriant hair. Her eyes were large, the irises distended as though touched with belladonna, and Philip felt his mistrust fall away from off him, as in some fairy tale

the armour of a knight loosens itself, drops, and leaves him unharnessed before an enchantress. But the enchantment which dissolved his panoply of suspicion was an innocent one, it was the manifestation of real suffering. He could see that the girl was rendered almost ill by the mental distress caused by the loss of her friend and guardian. That she had loved him, and loved him with an innocent, unselfish affection, seemed to him undoubted.

‘I beg your pardon for waylaying you, Mr. Pennycomequick,’ she said, in a timid voice; one white hand lifted, with an uncertain shake in it, touching her lips. ‘But I very much desire to have a word with you in private before you go upstairs to Mrs. Sidebottom.’

‘I’m at your service.’

She led the way into the breakfast-room, recently cleared of the meal. She went to the window, and stood between the glass and the curtain, with her left hand entangled among the cords of the Venetian blind. In her nervousness it was necessary for her to take hold of something. Her delicate fingers ran up the green strings and played with them, as though they were the strings of a harp on which she was practising,

and, strangely enough, Philip felt within him every touch ; when she twanged a cord, some fibre in him quivered responsive, and was only lulled when she clasped the string and stopped its vibration.

A faint tinge rose in her white face to the cheek-bones and temples, touching them with more than colour, an apparent inner light, like the Alpine glow after sundown on the white head of the Jungfrau. As she spoke she did not look at Philip, but with eyes modestly lowered on the ground, or out of the window looking sideways down the street.

‘ What I wished to say to you, Mr. Pennycomequick, will soon be said. I shall not detain you long. I am sorry to differ from Mrs. Sidebottom, but I cannot share her conviction that the body found last night is that of your uncle.’

‘ You do not dispute that he is dead ?’

‘ No,’ she sighed ; ‘ I think there can be no question about that.’

‘ Or that he was last seen on the canal bank at no great distance from where the discovery was made ?’

‘ No,’ she said, and her fingers unconsciously played

on the blind cords the time of the melody in Chopin's 'Marche Funèbre.'

'Why do you say no?'

'Mr. Pennycomequick was full dressed when he went out—that is to say, he had on his great-coat and his boots and—in fact it was not possible that he could be discovered in the condition in which the body recovered from the canal was found.'

'It is, of course, difficult to account for it, but not impossible. My aunt declares that she went up to the bedroom of my uncle the same night, found the bed disturbed, and the dress clothes, or some of them, on the chair. She concludes that he pulled on his overcoat and went out half-dressed, that he got caught by the water somewhere in some place of temporary refuge, and saw that his only chance of escape was to strip and swim. That he drew on his great coat again as a protection against the cold, till the proper moment came for him to make the plunge—but she concludes that he never did start to swim, either his courage failed him, or the flood rose too rapidly and carried him away before he had removed the overcoat. This may be an over-ingenious explanation,

nevertheless it *is* an explanation that accounts for all.'

'Not for all—the body is not that of Mr. Pennycomequick.' Salome spoke decidedly, and as she spoke her hand gripped the strings hard.

Philip stood by the table, resting his hand on it. The morning light fell strong on her face, and illumined her auburn hair. Philip took occasion to examine her countenance more closely than had been possible before. She was like her sister in build, in feature and in tone of colour, indeed strikingly like her, but in that only—certainly, Philip thought, in that only.

All at once she looked up and met Philip's eyes.

'No—a thousand times no,' she said. 'That is not uncle. He was brought here because Mrs. Sidebottom desired it, and is convinced of the identity. No objection that I can raise disturbs her. I thought that possibly, last night, I might have judged on insufficient evidence, and so I went this morning into the room to look at the corpse. Mrs. Sidebottom had sent last night for women who attended to it, and it was laid out in the spare room.' She began to tremble now as she spoke, and her fingers played a rapid

movement on the blind cords. 'I had made up my mind to look at him, and I did.'

She paused, to recover the control that was fast deserting her, as the delicate glow of colour in her face had now left it. 'It is not my uncle. I looked at his hands. The head is—is not to be seen, nothing is distinguishable there—but the hands are not those of Mr. Pennycomequick.'

'In what does the difference consist?'

'I cannot describe it. I knew his hands well. He often let me take them in mine when I sat on the stool at his feet by the fire, and I have kissed them.' The clear tears rose in her eyes and rolled down her cheeks. 'I am quite sure—if those had been his dear hands that I saw on the bed this morning, I would have kissed them again, but I could not.' She shook her head, and shook away the drops from her cheeks. 'No—I could not.'

'Miss Cusworth,' said Philip, 'you are perhaps unaware of the great alteration that is produced by immersion for many hours.'

'They are not his hands. That is not uncle.'

She was so conspicuously sincere, so sincerely dis-

tressed, that Philip relaxed his cold manner towards her, and said in a gentle tone :

‘ Did my uncle wear a ring? There was none on the hands of the man found yesterday.’

‘ No ; he wore no ring.’

‘ With what did he seal his letters?’

‘ Oh ! he had a brass seal with his initials on it, with a handle, that was in his pen-tray. He used to joke about it, and say he was a J.P. without the Queen’s commission.’

‘ For my own part,’ said Philip, ‘ I am beyond forming an opinion, as I have seen my uncle but once since I was a boy, and then under circumstances precluding exact observation.’

Salome said nothing to this, but heaved a long breath. Presently Philip said :

‘ Your mother—has she been taken upstairs?’

‘ Oh no!’ exclaimed Salome, excited as by a fresh terror. ‘ You do not know my mother. She has heart complaint, and we have to be most careful not unduly to excite and alarm her. She has suffered much on account of what has taken place ; and the shock of seeing——’ She shivered. ‘ It cannot be.’

‘ And your sister ?’

‘ She turned faint when brought to the door, and I could not persuade her to enter. She has been much tried by the German invasion of France, and her hurried journey.’

‘ Is there anything further you have to say ?’

‘ No ; Mrs. Sidebottom is wrong, that is all.’

Philip withdrew.

The girl had gained in his estimation. There was strength in her such as lacked in her sister. She must have had courage and determination to go by herself into the room where lay the mutilated corpse, and she had formed her own opinion, independently, and held to it with a firmness there was no breaking down.

Philip ascended the stairs thoughtfully. It had seemed to him at the time that his aunt had rushed at identification with undue precipitation ; still, she was the sister of Uncle Jeremiah, and therefore better capable than anyone else. Now he was himself uncertain.

When he entered the study where Mrs. Sidebottom was, she saluted him with :

‘Well, so you have had your interview with Salome. She has been hanging about the hall all the morning for the purpose of catching you.’

Philip made no reply. Her light tone jarred on his feelings, coming as he did from the presence of a girl full of sadness.

‘Has she gained you over to her side?’

‘Upon my word, I do not know what to think.’

‘Fiddlesticks!’ said Mrs. Sidebottom; ‘she has made eyes at you. Girls with good eyes know how to use them; they are better advocates than their tongues.’

‘The difficulty to identification seems to me insuperable.’

‘Pshaw! I have no doubt at all. He had been to bed; he went out without his coat and waistcoat. He was last seen on the canal bank, not so very far from the place where the corpse was found. The body is discovered wearing the great-coat. I have told you how I explain that. I suppose Salome has made a point to you that the nightshirt was not that of Uncle Jeremiah? Her mother looked after his linen.’

‘No; she said nothing of that.’

‘But I identify the shirt.’

‘You, aunt?’

‘Yes; it is one I gave him.’

‘You—gave him? An extraordinary present.’

‘Not at all. I was his sister; and I know that an old bachelor’s wardrobe would be in a sad state of neglect. I intended to replenish him with linen altogether.’

Philip was greatly surprised. He looked fixedly at his aunt, to make out whether she were speaking seriously. She dashed off, however, at once on another topic.

‘That girl,’ she said, ‘naturally resisted the conclusions at which I have arrived.’

‘Why naturally?’

‘Oh, you greenhorn! Because if it be established that Jeremiah is dead, out goes the whole Cusworth brood. They have lived here and preyed on him so long that they cannot endure the notion of having to leave, and will fight tooth and nail against the establishment of his decease.’

‘Not at all. You misjudge them. They allow that he is dead, but disbelieve in the identity of the corpse

found with my uncle who is lost, which is another matter.'

'Out they shall go,' said Mrs. Sidebottom.

'It is painful for them to leave a house where they have been happy, and in which the young ladies have grown up from childhood.'

'Other people have to undergo painful experiences,' said his aunt ; and again, 'Out they go.'

'Not at once.'

'As soon as the funeral is over.'

'But why act with such precipitation ?'

'Because I cannot endure them. Do you remember the story of the Republican judge, when a gentleman contended before him for his paternal acres against a *sans-culotte*, who had appropriated them? "These acres," said the plaintiff, "have belonged to my family for four hundred years." "High time," said the judge, "that they should be transferred to others ;" and he gave sentence for the defendant. These Cusworths have been in possession quite long enough. High time that they should budge, and make room for me.'

'But you must consider the feelings of the old

lady. You have no excuse for acting peremptorily.'

'I shall inquire what wage she has received, pay her a month, and send her off. That is to say,' added Mrs. Sidebottom on further consideration, 'I will pay her as soon as I have got some of Jeremiah's money out of the bank.'

'And that cannot be touched till his will has been proved.'

'There is no will.'

'How do you know that?'

'I have searched every drawer, closet, and chest. I have looked everywhere. There is no will.'

'It will be at the lawyers's.'

'Jeremiah never had a lawyer. That was one of his fads.'

'Then at the bank.'

'I wrote to the bank the moment I heard of his death. I have received an answer. There is no will at the bank.'

'There is time enough to discuss this later.'

'No, there is not,' said Mrs. Sidebottom peremptorily. 'The factory must not be allowed to come to

a stand, and the business to drift away. You have no claim.'

'That remains to be seen. If there be no will, I shall have a claim, and a pretty substantial one.'

'Your father withdrew his share from the concern. I did not. I have my interest in the business, and will see that it be kept up. Where is Lamb?'

'The captain will be here directly. Hush! I hear him in the hall.'

In another minute, Lambert Pennycomequick entered the room, very fresh, well dressed, and pleasant.

'Lamb!' exclaimed his mother, 'there is no will.'

'Then, I suppose,' said the captain, 'we shall have to take out an administration. I don't understand these things myself, but Cousin Philip is here on the spot to manage for us.'

'If there be no will,' explained Philip, 'you, Aunt Louisa, as sole surviving sister of Uncle Jeremiah, will have to act. You will have to take oath that he is dead, and that he died intestate. Then you will be granted administration as next of kin. If I had any doubt about his death, I would enter a *caveat*

and prevent the grant ; and then the death would have to be proved in solemn form in court. But I have no doubt that my uncle is dead, though I may think it an open matter whether the body in the other room be his.'

'And, if I am granted administration as nearest of kin, all the property comes to me?' said Mrs. Sidebottom.

'Not so—most certainly.'

'Why not? I am nearest. I alone have a stake in the mill. Yours was withdrawn long ago. I am his sister, you only a half-nephew.'

'For all that, you do not take everything. I have my share.'

'Well, if it must be, we will divide into three. I take a third in addition to what I have by my marriage settlement ; Lamb has a third, and you the remainder.'

'Wrong again, aunt. Lambert is out of the running. The estate will be divided between you and me in equal portions.'

'This is monstrous. My Lambert is a nephew every whit as much as you.'

‘Yes, but you intervene. Such is the law.’

Mrs. Sidebottom was silent for a moment. Then she said irritably: ‘I wish now, heartily, that there had been a will. I know what Jeremiah’s intentions were, and I would grieve to my heart’s core to have them disregarded. In conscience, I could not act differently from his wishes. If he omitted to make a will, it was because he knew nothing of law, and supposed that everything would devolve to me, his sister. Philip, knowing the rectitude of your principles, I am sure you will decline to touch a penny of your uncle’s inheritance. You know very well that he never forgave your father, and that he always regarded his leaving the business as an acquittal of all further obligations towards him.’

‘I must put you out of doubt at once,’ said Philip. ‘I shall most certainly take my share.’

‘I do not believe that my brother died without a will. I never will believe it. It will turn up somehow. These old fogies have their odd ways. Perhaps it is at the mill in his office desk. What a world of contrarieties we do live in! Those persons to whom we pin our faith as men of principle are just those

who fail us. However, to turn to another matter. I presume that I am in authority here. You have no *caveat* to offer against that ?

‘None at all.’

‘Then out go the Cusworths, and at once.’

‘Not at once. That is indecent. If you will have it so, after the funeral give them notice. You must act with humanity.’

‘The girl is insolent. She has the temerity to dispute my assertion that the dead man is Jeremiah.’

‘She is justified in forming her own opinion and expressing it.’

‘Of course, you take her part. She has been ogling you with good effect. Lamb, will you go down and call her up? I must have a word with her at once, and ascertain the amount of wages her mother has received, and how much is due.’

‘Remember,’ said Philip, ‘that Mrs. Baynes has come here from Normandy, and that Mrs. Cusworth is ill, and that houses are scarce at present in Mer-gatroyd.’

‘Then let them go elsewhere. To Jericho, for all I care.’

Philip was very angry. He was offended at his aunt's insinuations about himself, and indignant at her want of feeling towards those who had been companions and friends to his uncle.

Lambert had left the room as desired.

'Aunt Louisa,' said Philip, 'I insist upon your acting with courtesy and consideration towards the Cusworths. I do not mean to threaten you ; but I shall not tolerate conduct that appears to me as ill-judged as unjust. As you said yourself, we must remember and act upon the wishes of the deceased ; and it would be contrary to them that the old lady and her daughters should be treated with disrespect and unkindness.'

'You leave me to deal with them,' said Mrs. Sidebottom, somewhat cowed by his manner.

'You know my opinion. You will find it not to your advantage to disregard it,' said Philip haughtily.

Mrs. Sidebottom shuffled her feet, and arranged her skirts, frowned, and examined her pocket-handkerchief, where she discovered an iron-mould.

Then Lambert reappeared with Salome, and as they entered the door, Philip turned towards it and

took up his position near the girl, facing his aunt, as if to protect Salome from insolence and injustice. Mrs. Sidebottom understood the signification of the movement, bit her lips, and said with constraint, looking on the ground: 'May I ask you, Miss Cusworth, to favour us by taking a chair? There is no occasion for you to stand in my presence. I have taken the liberty to send for you, because my poor dear brother is dead, and as no reasonable doubt remains in any unprejudiced mind that his body has been found——'

Salome's lips closed. She looked at Philip, but said nothing. She had made her protest. One on this occasion would be superfluous.

'We desire in every way to act according to the wishes of my darling brother, whom it has pleased a beneficent Providence'—she wiped her eyes—'to remove from this vale of tears. As his sister, knowing his inmost thoughts, the disposition of his most sacred wishes, his only confidant in the close of life, I may say I know what his intentions were as well as if he had left a will.'

'There is a will,' said Salome quietly.

‘ A will !—Where ?’

‘ In my workbox.’

A silence ensued. Mrs. Sidebottom looked very blank.

‘ On the very night he died he gave it me to keep, and I put it away in my workbox, as I had nothing else that locked up. My workbox is in my room upstairs. Shall I fetch the will ?’

‘ No,’ said Philip, ‘ let it stay where it is till after the funeral.’

CHAPTER XII.

SURPRISES.

WHEN the funeral was over, and the family of Pennycomequick was assembled in the house of the deceased, or assumed to be deceased, manufacturer, Mrs. Sidebottom sent her compliments to Salome, with a request that she would favour her with an interview in the dining-room.

Mrs. Sidebottom was dressed in fresh black satin and crape that became her well, as her hair and face were fair. Of this she was aware, and she took the opportunity of surveying herself in every mirror that she passed. Really in her mourning she looked young again. The black seemed to produce on her much the same effect as the photographer's stipple, wherewith he effaces the wrinkles of the negative. It was as though the life of Pennycomequick were a capital of which, when Jeremiah lost hold, his heirs

had taken possession. Not Mrs. Sidebottom only, but also her son seemed to have come in for a bequest of vitality. The captain looked brighter, less languid than he had for long.

Philip's suspicious nature had been displeased by the statement of Salome that the will was in her possession. It appeared to him strange that the old man should have entrusted so important a document to the care of a girl of nineteen or twenty. It roused in his mind that mistrust which had been laid. He asked whether the fact of this consignment did not show that the Cusworth family were deeply interested in the will; whether this taking possession of it were not the conclusion of a conspiracy to get the old man to make a testament altogether in their favour.

He did not, on this occasion, move to meet Salome when she entered the room, but took his position apart, with arms folded, and face imperturbable, and set hard, as if a frost had congealed it.

Philip was not by any means unconcerned as to the disposition of his uncle's property. He would have been raised above the passions and ambitions of human nature had he been unconcerned, for the

disposition was likely to affect materially his whole after-life.

Philip was now aged thirty-four years, and was only a solicitor's clerk. The utmost he could expect, without a windfall, would be when well advanced in years to be taken into the firm of Pinch and Squeeze for his mastery of the details of the business. He would be incapable of purchasing a partnership, as he was wholly without capital. What means his father had possessed had been thrown away, and therewith his prospects.

Philip's only chance of recovering his proper position was through a bequest from the uncle whose will was about to be read.

If Jeremiah had died intestate, he would have come in for a share of the business, and for a good lump sum of money, for it is quite certain that his uncle had saved money. He might then have either purchased a partnership in a good legal house, or carried on the factory, remaining at Mergatroyd.

It was true that he knew nothing of the *technique* of linen weaving, but his training had taught him business habits, and he was confident that in a short

time he would be able to master the ramifications of the business. There is a tool sold by ironmongers that contains in the handle, saw, file, gimlet, turn-screw, chisel, bradawl, and punch. The nozzle of the handle is provided with a grip that holds or discharges such of the tools as are required or done with. Thus the instrument can be converted at pleasure into whatever is desired.

A business education makes a man into such a convertible tool, ready, as required, to be saw, file, turnscrew, or punch. Philip was conscious of his mental flexibility, and confident that if he resolved to make a new departure, he could fit himself to it. The knowledge that he had been without means had not soured him as it had his father, but had hardened him. His profession had conduced, as this profession does in many cases, to foster in him a strong and touchy sense of rectitude. Brought into contact with mankind in its ignoble aspects, seeing its sordidness, selfishness, laxity of principle where self-interest is concerned, he had framed for himself a rigorous code of honour, from which nothing would make him swerve by a hair's-breadth.

In the past he had made no calculation on receiving anything from his uncle, but now that the possibility of his getting something was presented to him, he could not contemplate the decisive moment with equanimity. The tiger that has tasted human blood, ever after disdains the food that previously satisfied its maw ; and the young lady who has been through a London season, or only ventured into a first ball, will not afterwards return to the sobriety and monotony of country life. If Philip had been left to plod on at Nottingham without expectations, he would have accommodated himself to his situation with dull resignation ; but now that a prospect of independence had been dangled before his eyes, he could not return to his old career without intensified distaste.

Yet he was far from forming great hopes. He knew that Jeremiah had been a vindictive old man, never forgiving his brother a mistake which had cost that brother more suffering than it had Jeremiah. It was more probable that the old manufacturer would leave everything to his sister and her son, with whom he had always maintained unbroken connection, than that he should favour him. Whether Jeremiah liked

and trusted his sister and her son, and to what extent he liked and trusted them, Philip had not the means of judging, that alone could be revealed by the will.

If he should be disappointed, his disappointment would be more grievous to bear than he cared to acknowledge to himself. He was, indeed, angry with himself for feeling any flutter of hope. If he should be disappointed, he would return to Nottingham, to his former routine of life, and spend the rest of it in a subordinate position, destitute of that brightness and ease for which a man of education craves as an atmosphere in which his soul can breathe and expand. He did not desire ease because indolent, but to obtain scope for his faculties to develop in other directions than those to which they were professionally turned ; and to polish the other facets of the inner self than those exposed to the daily grindstone. He would like to buy books, to take a holiday on the Continent, to purchase small artistic treasures, to be able to rise out of the contracted circle of petty clerk-life, with all its small prejudices and narrow interests.

For fifteen years he had lived this life that was un-

congenial, and unless his uncle's money gave him wings to rise out of it, he must remain in this Stympthalian bog. Consequently it was with a beating heart, and with inward fluctuations of hope and fear, that he awaited the decision ; but none of this unrest could be seen in his face, that did not bear in it a sign of expectation.

As Salome entered, Mrs. Sidebottom waved to her to take a seat. The girl, however, with a slight acknowledgment, stepped up to Philip, and extending to him the will, said : ' It was given to me to keep safely, should anything occur. I cannot even now resign it absolutely, as Mr. Pennycomequick told me that I was to keep it and prove it.'

' You prove it !' exclaimed Philip, glancing at her suspiciously.

' You !' cried Mrs. Sidebottom. ' Fiddlesticks ! That is to say, impossible.'

' You must remain in the room, Miss Cusworth,' said Philip, ' whilst the will is read, after which we will remit it to your charge.'

' I object to such as are not of the family being present,' said Mrs. Sidebottom.

‘Your objection must be put aside,’ answered Philip. ‘As Miss Cusworth has been entrusted with the document, and required to prove it, she must remain.’

Mrs. Sidebottom tossed her head.

Philip drew his penknife from his pocket, opened it, and leisurely cut through the top of the envelope, extracted the document, and unfolded it. He glanced at the heading, and then, with lawyer-like instinct, at the end, then, with a sharp look of surprise at Salome, who waited with lowered eyes, he said: ‘This is worthless. The signature has been torn away.’

‘Torn away!’ echoed Mrs. Sidebottom.

Salome looked up in astonishment.

‘This is a cancelled will,’ said Philip. ‘It is of no more value than waste paper. When do you say my uncle entrusted it to you?’

‘Shortly before he left the house on the night that he disappeared. I am quite sure he thought it was of importance, from his manner towards me in commending it. He said it was a trust, an important trust.’

‘Then,’ said Philip, ‘there is some mystery behind unsolved.’

‘Read it,’ urged Mrs. Sidebottom; ‘and see if that will clear it up.’

‘I will read it, certainly,’ said Philip; ‘but it is a document entirely devoid of legal force.’

Philip began to run his eye over it before reading aloud.

‘Well, upon my word,’ said Mrs. Sidebottom, ‘you are inclined to keep us on tenterhooks. The will, if not valid, is still interesting, no doubt.’

‘This,’ said Philip, in a tone that had harshness in it, ‘this is a most extraordinary document. It is in the first place clearly made up from some of those formulas which are found in popular handbooks; for aught I know picked out of “Inquire Within for Everything,” or the “Family Save-All.” The last portion is also clearly taken from no formula at all, but is the expression of my uncle’s peculiar idiosyncrasies.’

‘Well, read it, and pass your comments on it later,’ said Mrs. Sidebottom, shifting her position in her seat and rearranging her skirts.

Before reading, Philip cast a searching glance at Salome. He now seated himself at the table, and proceeded to read :

‘I, Jeremiah Pennycomequick, of Mergatroyd, in the County of York, and the West Riding of said county, manufacturer, being in sound health and in full possession of my faculties, do give, bequeath, and devise all the real and personal estate of which I shall be possessed or entitled at the time of my decease, together with my factory, my house with garden, which are all leasehold for twenty-one years, together with all the appurtenances thereof, unto Salome Cusworth, my adopted daughter, absolutely; chargeable, however, with such sum annually to be paid out of the profits, *pro rata*, to my half-sister, Louisa Sidebottom, as was agreed by her marriage settlement. And I further direct and bequeath to my nephew, Lambert Sidebottom, and to my nephew, Philip Pennycomequick, to each severally an annuity of one hundred pounds, to be paid to the said Lambert Sidebottom and the said Philip Pennycomequick during their respective lives, in half-quarterly payments. And I hereby request my executor to invest a sufficient sum in the purchase of such annuities out of the moneys arising from my personal estate. And I further appoint the aforesaid Salome Cusworth, my adopted

daughter, sole executrix of my will, and revoke all former wills by me at any time heretofore made.

‘ And whereas I have been during the whole course of my lifetime an enemy to lawsuits, and what little I leave I desire may not be squandered away on the gentlemen of the long robe, for whom all the veneration I have is at a distance, and wishing that there was more justice and less law in the world, I devise that should any legatee trouble my executor by going to law, by commencing any suit of law, in any tribunal whatsoever, the said person be deprived of the benefit of the legacy hereby bequeathed.’*

Philip paused, then added: ‘ The will is dated about a twelvemonth ago, and is witnessed by Marianne Cusworth, widow, of Mergatroyd, and John Dale, surgeon, of Bridlington.’ The silence that had been maintained during the reading continued unbroken for a couple of minutes after it was concluded.

The first to break it was the captain, who said: ‘ A bad job for me. I lose my hundred a year, and am left as before, dependent on my mother’s apron-string.’

* The conclusion of this will is taken verbatim from one made by a member of the author’s family, and proved in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury (Bedford, f. 167).

Philip looked at Salome ; she saw by the contraction of the irises of his eyes that there was aversion in his heart.

‘Miss Cusworth,’ he said in metallic tones, ‘there is but one explanation of this extraordinary matter ; this explanation that presents itself to my mind is not to your credit. Shall I say what I think, or shall I forbear ?’

‘Tell me what your opinion is,’ she said quietly.

‘This will was drawn up, clearly without advice and by his own hand, by my uncle, Mr. Jeremiah Pennycomequick. What can have induced him to make such an unjust disposition of his property in your favour you can best tell.’

‘I cannot tell. It is unjust. I am glad that the will is worthless.’

‘Sour grapes,’ muttered Mrs. Sidebottom to her son.

‘That undue influence was exercised, I make no doubt. Had this will been perfect, with signature complete, Mrs. Sidebottom, who risks nothing by the outrageous proviso in the second part, would have contested it ; this I doubt no more than I doubt that

pressure was brought to bear on an old, and perhaps feeble man, to make this will.'

Salome's blood flamed up to the roots of her hair.

'After this will had been made and duly attested, my uncle on thinking the matter over calmly, considered the injustice he had done, and cancelled his signature. He had changed his mind. You, I presume, still exercised pressure on him, and to relieve himself of this, he gave the will into your custody ; it was a deception probably justifiable under the circumstances. He unquestionably intended to make another will with quite different provisions, but was prevented by death from executing his intentions.'

'You think,' exclaimed Salome, her bosom heaving and her colour changing rapidly—'you think I could behave so unworthily.'

'I can find no other solution.'

She was cut, wounded to her heart's core.

'You say that the will was given you to keep. For what reason? Because it interested you extraordinarily?'

'Yes,' said Salome, 'so Mr. Pennycomequick said when he gave it me.'

‘But why did he think it necessary to give it you when he knew it was invalid? He must have done it to quiet your importunities. I can see no other reason.’

‘You wrong me,’ said the girl, with pain and dignity. ‘I am sure that he did not know it was worthless when he handed it to me. His manner was so serious.’

‘You do not suppose it was tampered with after it came into your possession?’

‘Oh no, certainly not. It was locked up in my workbox under the tray where are my cottons and needles.’

Mrs. Sidebottom watched their faces and followed the dialogue with almost breathless attention. Now she smiled sarcastically.

‘It is disappointing,’ she said, ‘after the toils have been laid to lose the game.’

Salome again crimsoned.

‘You think that I used my position in this house, took advantage of my nearness to Mr. Pennycomequick, to induce him to commit an injustice?’

Philip bowed stiffly.

‘ You charge me with the grossest breach of honour, with wicked ingratitude to the man who has been to me as a father ?’

‘ We do not accuse you personally,’ said Lambert, who thought that, as he would have expressed it, his cousin and mother were ‘ down on the girl too hard,’ ‘ but we think it awfully queer that uncle should have made such a will. Your mother, for instance——’

‘ My mother is as incapable of such meanness as myself,’ said Salome. ‘ To such as can think of me so basely, no justification I could make would be of any avail. With your leave——’

She bowed, and now white as ivory, with spots of fire in her temples, she swept out of the room.

CHAPTER XIII.

WHAT NEXT?

WHAT was to be done?

Mrs. Sidebottom was the first to see what was to be done.

'I shall take out an administration at once,' she said.

Philip said nothing. Of course she must do what she said. She was the proper person to take out an administration as nearest of kin. But he was not thinking of her and of what she proposed to do. He was standing still with the will in his hand. Salome had not reclaimed it, as it was worthless. He proceeded to fold it and replace it in the cover. Philip was not easy in his mind. He had spoken in a rude manner to the girl, throwing a gross charge against her, and had grievously hurt her.

Was the charge just? Was it possible to explain the peculiar circumstances in any other way than that which had occurred to him?

Suddenly looking up at Mrs. Sidebottom, and then at the captain, he looked down again, and this time with great attention at the envelope.

‘The envelope has been tampered with,’ he said.

‘In what way?’ asked Mrs. Sidebottom.

‘It has been opened by means of a heated penknife. Here are the marks of the smoke that have been rubbed off the blade upon the paper; and here are cuts made by the knife in the paper. The envelope, after having been sealed, was opened carefully, even cunningly.’

‘Why carefully or cunningly I cannot tell, but of course opened it has been,’ said Mrs. Sidebottom. ‘You do not suppose Jeremiah could destroy his signature without opening the envelope?’

‘Certainly not. But I should not have supposed he would take pains to do it in such a manner. He had plenty of long envelopes at hand. Then, again, to refasten it a different sealing-wax was employed to what had been used before, a slight difference in tint

of scarlet, and one impression of the stamp can be traced over the other, the earlier not being wholly obliterated. Excuse me one moment, Aunt Louisa, I should like to have a look at my uncle's study.'

'Philip—the room is in disorder!' said Mrs. Sidebottom, starting to her feet and flushing, 'I cannot, really; upon my word, I will not permit——'

But he had left the room before she could prevent him. She moved to follow him, but reconsidered herself and turned back.

'Fiddlesticks!' she said angrily; 'nothing but fiddlesticks.'

'I am the sufferer,' grumbled Lambert; 'I shall be left in the cold. You and Philip take everything.'

'What I have serves to make you comfortable,' retorted the mother.

'That may be,' answered Lambert, 'but it is one thing to have money of one's own, and another thing to have to come to one's mammy for every penny, and to find that the mammy rarely has any pennies in her purse.'

'Hitherto I have been pinched in circumstances. It will be different now, Lamb, you will see.' After a

pause, she added, ' Unless that meddlesome, vexatious prig, Philip, prove an obstruction.

Presently Philip returned.

'It is as I thought,' said he. 'The sealing-wax employed the second time is that now in the pen-tray on my uncle's desk; not only so, but his knife is there also, bearing on it the traces of exposure to fire. It was probably thrust into the flame of the gas to heat it so as to enable it to dissolve the wax off the seal.'

'No doubt about it,' said Mrs. Sidebottom; 'and this proves that Jeremiah cancelled his will shortly before his death. I should not be surprised if he did it the same night that he died, immediately before giving it to Salome.'

'The case is a most extraordinary one,' said Philip.

'Not at all; it is clear as day.'

Philip did not care to debate the matter with his aunt, so he left the room, and taking his hat, entered the garden.

The garden, as already said, descended from the house to the valley. It consisted of two slopes, divided by a wall; the upper slope ended in a terrace-walk, with the coping of the wall serving as a parapet

to it. Access to the lower garden was obtained by a flight of steps at each end. The upper of the two divisions was devoted to flowers, the lower to vegetables, and fruit-trees were trained against the wall that buttressed up the terrace.

Philip paced the upper terrace for several minutes, and was unable to come to a decision ; he could not see that the matter was as simple as his aunt pretended. For, as he argued, why should his uncle have taken pains to preserve the original envelope when there was no apparent necessity for so doing. If anyone else had opened the envelope, then he could understand the care taken to preserve it with its superscription, 'The Last Will and Testament of Jeremiah Pennycomequick,' and to conceal the fact that it had been adroitly unclosed.

But who would have been likely to commit such an act? Certainly not Salome, in whose keeping, under lock and key, the will had been. It was hardly possible that it had been tampered with since it was given to her. Was it possible that it had been cancelled before, unknown to Jeremiah ?

Philip saw that he had not the data, or had not data

sufficient, on which to come to a decision. He must have another interview with Salome. He therefore returned to the house, and meeting a servant in the hall, asked her to request Miss Cusworth to speak with him a few minutes in the garden.

Without delay Salome came. She had not put on a bonnet, but had thrown a gray shawl over her head, and pinned it under her chin like a mill-girl. Some of her burnished hair, like autumn oak-leaves flaming in the evening sun, shone out from under the shawl, and the gray wool contrasted pleasantly with the delicately beautiful complexion, now no longer white, but with flying tinges of colour in it, like a sunset sky in which are drifts of vapour, high aloft, undefined, yet sensitive to the rays of the declining orb. She was deeply wounded, and the changes in her colour followed the fluctuations of resentment, humiliation, anger and pain in her heart.

She had been crying—Philip saw that—for though she had wiped her eyes, the tears were still near the surface, and with difficulty restrained from overflowing.

‘Miss Cusworth,’ said Philip, with stiffness, but an

attempt at graciousness, 'I regret that I addressed you a few moments ago without that charity which I was bound to entertain. I was surprised, indignant, and rushed to a conclusion which may prove to have been formed too precipitately. I shall be greatly—very greatly obliged, if you will accept my apology, and allow me to ask you a series of questions on the subject of the will, to enable me to form a matured opinion as to the manner in which it was cancelled, and by whom it was done ; two points that appear to me at this moment by no means as clear as they did a quarter of an hour ago, because a close examination of the envelope has shown me that it was opened recently, and in a manner that seems to me suspicious.'

'I will answer any questions you put—as far as it is in my ability to answer them.'

'And—we shall be more at our ease, more in private, if we take the lower walk at the foot of the wall,' said Philip, 'as from the windows everyone can see us here and comment on our interview. May I ask you to do me the further favour of walking with me below the steps?'

'Certainly,' answered Salome, and began to descend.

Philip would have been devoid of the elementary faculties by which beauty is perceived and admired, if he had not been struck at this time by the young and graceful figure that preceded him, and by the perfect sweetness of the innocent, sad face that turned at the bottom and looked back at him. She did not reproach him with her eyes, and yet, when he caught them, his own eyes fell, and he became uncomfortable and conscious of having wronged her. She puzzled him. Was she tricky, double, self-seeking? or was she what she looked—sincere and straightforward?

A consciousness stole over Philip that had he lived in the same house with her for sixteen or seventeen years, as had Uncle Jeremiah, and had come to make his will, then without her uttering a word of persuasion, he would be leaving her **everything** he had—just as Jeremiah had at one time done; only he would never have worded his will in such a clumsy, absurd, and unusual fashion. As soon as he reached the foot of the steps, he took his place at her side. Here was a broad walk parallel to that above, facing the sun, sheltered, with the trained trees against the wall on one side, and a box-edging on the other, with, in

summer, a border of herbaceous flowers fringing the beds of cabbage, onions, brussels sprouts, and carrots.

‘I am at your service,’ said Salome.

‘Then I will begin my catechism at once,’ said Philip. ‘Please to give me an exact account of what passed in your last interview with Mr. Pennycomequick.’

‘Do you mean actually the last—as he went out for his walk by the canal, or when he gave me the will to keep?’

‘I mean the latter.’

‘He had been out to dinner. I sat up awaiting him, thinking he might want something before he went to bed. It was most unusual for him to accept invitations to dine out. When he came back——’

‘He had been dining with Mrs. Sidebottom, I think?’

‘Yes; when he came back it was early—that is to say, earlier than I expected. But he was out of spirits, and told me he left as soon as he could get away for that reason.’

‘Had anything occurred to disturb him?’

‘Not that I know. But he certainly was in a

more desponding mood than I had seen him in at any time previously.'

'Did he give any reason for it?'

Salome hesitated.

'What reason did he give for his depressed spirits?'

'He did not exactly give a reason for it, but he was a little mistrustful—perhaps of the world in general.'

'And of anyone in particular?'

Salome coloured; her hand caught her shawl below her chin and worked nervously at it.

'I had rather you did not force me to answer that question,' she said timidly.

'Very well,' said Philip, 'only let me observe that this is not answering me with the fulness that was promised.'

'I think he was unjust—and I had rather that little ebullition of injustice was forgotten.'

'Go on,' said Philip. 'Did he give you the will, then?—and was it in anyway in connection with the mistrust he expressed?'

'I cannot say that. He started up, said he would

confide to me a most solemn trust, that concerned me nearly, and went out of the room——’

‘Whither did he go?’

‘To the study, I fancy; and in a moment returned——’

‘Excuse me. In a moment?’

‘Yes, almost directly, returned with the paper.’

‘It was in the envelope?’

‘Oh yes, just as I gave it you.’

‘You do not think he would have had time to open the envelope, tear off his signature, and reseal the cover before coming back to the room where you were?’

‘Oh no! He went upstairs and came down again immediately.’

‘Now tell me. Are you quite sure that he believed the will was intact when he gave it you?’

‘I am sure of it from his manner.’

‘And where did he keep it before he gave it you?’

‘I do not know.’

‘Had you any previous knowledge of the will and its contents?’

‘None whatever. I have not even heard my mother

‘speak of it ; and she must have known, because she witnessed it. But I am sure also she had no idea as to its contents, or she would have joined with me in entreating him not to make such an unjust disposition of his property. I am glad the will is worthless, because I never could have felt that I had a right to receive all uncle—I mean Mr. Pennycomequick—left me in that will. I should have felt that I was robbing the relations, and I would have refused to benefit by the will.’

‘Who is the John Dale who signed as witness along with your mother ?’

‘Mr. Dale ! Oh, he was a dear friend of Mr. Pennycomequick. He always spent his Christmas here, and uncle went at Whitsuntide to spend a few days with him at Bridlington. Mr. Dale is trustee to Janet. We both like him.’

Salome spoke so openly, so quietly, and with such self-possession, that again his suspicions began to yield to the charm of her honesty, as they had before.

‘One matter further,’ said Philip. ‘After Mr. Pennycomequick had given you the will, you locked it up in—I remember you said—a workbox.’

‘Yes, in my workbox.’

‘And the workbox—was that put away anywhere?’

‘Oh no. I use it every day.’

‘Then—the same box is unlocked very often?’

‘Yes.’

‘And left unlocked?’

Salome hesitated a moment, then said: ‘Yes—but it is in my room. No one would meddle with my things—no one has any interest in my little odds and ends. Besides, no one would be so mean.’ Then after a pause, ‘Mr. Pennycomequick, you charged me with a piece of baseness which’—she shook her head impatiently, as if to shake off the imputation—‘which it is a stain on me to think of as possible. I could not—I would die rather than do what is mean. Mean!’ She turned her face suddenly round on him; it was flushed, and the eyes sparkled. ‘No, Mr. Pennycomequick, I could be wicked, but not mean—no, not that on any account, under whatever provocation—no, not mean!’

‘I beg your pardon, Miss Cusworth, most sincerely. I committed myself to a rash charge, which I withdraw.’

She paid no attention to his apology, but went on : 'No, I would not have taken advantage of the will had it been in form and right ; for that would have been mean. Dear Mr. Pennycomequick I loved and love still from the depths of my heart ; but he had his faults, and one was that he was not forgiving to his own relations—to you. And he thought harshly of his sister, Mrs. Sidebottom, and despised Captain Pennycomequick. I had no claim on him at all, and if he saw that he had done wrong, and had himself cancelled the will, no one would rejoice more than myself ; for it would show me that he had returned to a more kindly view of you all.'

'But how do you account for the signature being torn off?'

'I have not thought much about it since. I thought only of the hurt you had done me.'

'Is it possible that he can have changed his mind, invalidated his will, and then forgotten that he had done so? No, that is impossible. The act was too recent,' Philip argued aloud.

'I would not have had people think ill of dear old uncle,' said Salome, pursuing her own train of thought,

little concerned how the will was invalidated, concerned only with her solicitude for the memory of the deceased. 'He had been unspeakably kind to my mother and my sister and me. Everyone would talk, all would say he had been unjust, supposing that will had stood. Over his grave—that was not he who was buried to-day—his grave, wherever it may be, heart-burnings would have arisen, and reproachful words would have been cast at his memory. He wrote that will in some queer mood when he was not quite himself. He never, I must say it, quite valued Mrs. Sidebottom as a sister, and he was ill-pleased when she left York and settled at Mergatroyd. The captain, he thought, had not much brains and was imprudent about money. You he did not know, and he had a mistaken prejudice against lawyers. But there—how the will was made of no effect; whether by himself or—or how, matters little; the deed is done, and no one can ever say that he wronged his own flesh and blood.'

She had spoken quickly, eagerly, without pause, and with a heightened colour.

A sudden idea came into Philip's mind with a flash.

‘You—Miss Cusworth! For the sake of his memory did you meddle with the will?’

This was a repetition of the charge. First, he charged her with coarse self-seeking, now with blind self-effacement.

‘I—I—oh! Mr. Pennycomequick, of course not. It was a trust. I could not touch it, even to save his dear name from reproach.’

‘Miss Cusworth,’ said Philip, ‘have you any objection to my seeing your mother?’

‘Not in the least. Only remember she is frail. She suffers from her heart.’

‘Will you take me to her at once?’

‘Certainly. Follow me.’

She led Philip up the steps, through the upper garden; Philip’s eyes, which had watched her descend the steps with admiration, saw her mount them with even greater. She conducted him to the room occupied by her mother as a parlour.

The old lady was in black, and was dusting. That was her daily occupation. She travelled about the house with a duster in her pocket, and when the duster became dirty she took her pocket-handkerchief

and dusted with that ; and it was also black. She had been an energetic woman in her youth, and now that she suffered from her heart, was impatient at not being allowed to do as much as she had been wont. She had made an excellent housekeeper to Mr. Pennycomequick. When he was short of domestics she turned her hand to anything—cooked, did housework, needlework—would have cleaned the knives and boots if the boy had failed. The deficiency in servants was not an extraordinary event. In a manufacturing district few girls care to enter domestic service and submit to its restraints, when they can earn their livelihood at the mills, and have the evenings to themselves in which to meet their friends. When Mr. Pennycomequick's establishment was complete, she spent her day in making up for the deficiencies of the domestics—putting straight what they had crooked, cleaning out corners they had neglected, brushing down cobwebs they had overlooked, detecting breakages they had made, and repairing rents they had effected in household linen. She was not a good-looking woman, but the likeness of the two girls to her was traceable ; moreover, she must have had at one time auburn hair,

for though her hair was much darker now, it had in it glints of red copper. Her heart-complaint had given to her face a waxy, even greenish tint, and her lips were leaden.

On being introduced to her, Philip felt somewhat ashamed of not having made her acquaintance before, because he had allowed himself to be influenced by Mrs. Sidebottom's prejudice. His aunt had treated the widow with studied indifference, and when noticing her, behaved towards her with superciliousness. Mrs. Cusworth had accordingly kept very much to herself in the rooms allotted to her use.

Janet was fired with indignation at the discourtesy shown to her mother; she wished to defy Mrs. Sidebottom, but her mother bade her remember that now this lady was in authority, and that she and her daughters remained in the house upon sufferance only.

Philip bowed on entering, and apologized somewhat lamely for not having made the lady's acquaintance earlier, and then, turning, saw Salome glide out of the room with her arm in that of her sister. The girl rightly understood that Philip desired to speak with

Mrs. Cusworth alone. He proceeded at once to cross-question her on the subject of the will.

‘You must excuse me,’ he said, ‘but I am forced to make inquiries. I presume you have been told that a very advantageous will, made in favour of your daughter, has been found, cancelled, and no subsequently drawn will has been discovered. Mr. Pennycomequick gave this valueless one to Miss Cusworth to keep, and I cannot doubt he did so believing he entrusted her with one that was valid. Now, either he took this one by mistake for a subsequent will which has disappeared, or the will has been—no, I will not commit myself to the statement of the alternative. Be so good as to tell me what you recollect about the signing of the will?’

‘It was done just after Janet’s wedding.’

‘Were you aware of the contents?’

‘Certainly not. Mr. Pennycomequick sent for me to his study, where he was with Dr. Dale. He merely asked me to witness his signature to his will; but he entered into no particulars.’

‘You had no reason to believe he intended to constitute Miss Cusworth his heiress?’

‘Not the least. I supposed he would leave her something as he had dealt so liberally by my other daughter at her marriage; I neither wished for nor expected more; certainly for nothing which might cause annoyance to the family.’

‘He never alluded to his intention?’

‘Never. He was a reserved man.’

‘And you have no reason to suppose he made another will subsequent to that?’

‘I know nothing. I was not called in to witness another.’

‘Thank you,’ said Philip, rising. ‘The mystery is to me as dark now as before, only’—and this he said to himself—‘the one explanation I gave at first is, I am now convinced, certainly the wrong one.’

CHAPTER XIV.

ADMINISTRATION.

PHILIP PENNYCOMEQUICK returned to the garden. He was still greatly perplexed, but a new and disquieting suspicion had invaded his mind. He was now completely satisfied that no undue influence had been used to force the old man to make his extraordinary will. He was also tolerably certain that he handed it to Salome in good faith, believing it to be untouched. The will had been tampered with, either just before or after his death. It was hardly possible that this could have been done before, when preserved, as he little doubted, in the iron chest in which Jeremiah kept all his deeds and papers of value. It was more probable that the mutilation had been effected afterwards, when carelessly kept in Salome's workbox, which probably had a lock easily fitted with a key

and which was sometimes incautiously left unlocked when Salome was not in her room.

But who would be likely to do such an act, commit a felony? He dared not accuse his aunt; even in thought, such an accusation was too terrible. He had no confidence in her rectitude. His mistrust of her truthfulness had been deepened by her audacious assertion that Jeremiah had worn a nightshirt she had given him, a statement which he was convinced was untrue, and one made by her to get over the difficulty about the linen of the drowned man differing from that known to have belonged to her brother.

He could not disguise from himself that, on the supposition that Mrs. Sidebottom had mutilated the will, all the difficulty in explaining the mystery disappeared. She had heard from Salome where the will was—in her desk and in her room. It was to Mrs. Sidebottom's interest to know its contents, and to invalidate it when she did know them. But Philip, though he held his aunt in low esteem, could hardly think she could be guilty of such wickedness. But how else explain the difficulty. Then, again, supposing he reached moral conviction that she had

tampered with the document, what course could he pursue? He had absolutely no evidence to justify a public accusation, and without very strong and conclusive evidence he could not make such a charge—a charge of felony against his own aunt.

When he considered the grounds on which his suspicion rested, he found how slight they were. The facts were that Mrs. Sidebottom knew where the will was, that she was in the house, and had opportunities of obtaining access to the will, and that it was to her interest to destroy its force. He had no reason to think his aunt morally capable of such a crime. His belief in her veracity was shaken, but it is a long way between telling a lie and committing a crime such as that he was half-inclined to attribute to her.

With his mind still unsatisfied he went to the study, where he knew he would find her. Captain Lambert had gone out. The captain had borne the restraint imposed on him by the death of his uncle with impatience. He had been prevented from playing his usual game of billiards. He had yawned in the morning and stood at the window with his hands in

his pockets, then had shifted his position to the fire, and stood before that with his hands behind him, and found neither position to his taste. In the afternoon he had lounged between the two houses, and had sauntered in the garden, and grumbled and yawned continually. In the evening, when alone after dinner, in his frogged smoking-jacket and slippers, lounging in an arm-chair, he read a little, and when Philip was there, talked with him. But nothing satisfied him; the *Field* he found 'awfully dull!' his cousin 'awfully prosy!' and he pronounced as his criticism of every novel he dipped into that it was 'awful trash!'

Philip and Lambert had no interests in common, because Lambert had no interests at all. Philip was reserved, Lambert open, with the difference that exists between a purse and a glove. Philip had much in him which was not for all the world, Lambert had nothing in him whatever.

Lambert was easy-going, selfish and good-natured in what did not touch his own comfort and ease. He had little conversation, and what he had was uninteresting. We come across people continually who

have to be dredged that anything may be got out of them, and when dredged, yield nothing to compensate the labour of dredging. In some rivers it is worth while to try the depths with rakes and grapples, or even by diving, for on examination they yield gold-dust, diamonds and pearls. But out of others nothing is extracted save pots, weeds, the waste matter and sewage of civilization. When Lambert was dredged he gave up worthless stuff, scraps of stale news, old jokes worn to pieces, venerable conundrums that had lost their point, and familiar anecdotes retailed without salt. Undredged, he yielded nothing, except among those of his own mental calibre, and with them he talked about people he had met, houses at which he had visited, wines that he had drunk, game that he had shot, the relationships of his acquaintance, about jolly fellows, nice girls, good cigars, and scrumptious dinners. He was a harmless, lazy man who would not wilfully do what was wrong, and would never exert himself to do what was right.

There are tens of thousands of these negative beings about, male and female, useful in their way, as nitrogen is of use in the atmosphere, void of quality itself, but

diluting the active oxygen ; as certain ingredients are serviceable as fluxes to valuable metals, but have no other known use in creation.

Lambert's mother had energy for both, and managed for herself and for him. He was well content that it should be so, it saved him trouble. He left her to decide everything for him, as he left his clothes to be brushed and folded and put away by the servant. And as he was a man without a pursuit, he voted everything he had to do a bore, and was voted by everyone who knew him the worst of bores.

‘ Well, Philip,’ said Mrs. Sidebottom cheerily as her nephew entered ; she was engaged in looking through a list of designs for mourning dresses. ‘ Well, Philip, I am knocked to pieces with the strain, and am glad all is over. I hope you have had a satisfactory interview with that girl, brought her to a humble frame of mind, and induced her to confess that she and her mother concocted that abominable will ?’

‘ On the contrary,’ answered Philip gravely, ‘ I am satisfied from what she and Mrs. Cusworth have told me that they had nothing to do with it. Not only was no undue pressure brought to bear on my uncle, but

they were completely ignorant of the contents of his testament.'

'Fiddle-faddle,' said Mrs. Sidebottom, 'I don't give them credit for being such fools. They had Jeremiah in their hands for many years. He made that will in their favour, at their suggestion; only when I came here did his conscience speak out, and then he cancelled it. The case is as plain as a pikestaff.'

'You wrong her—her mother,' said Philip with some heat.

'You—yourself,' retorted Mrs. Sidebottom, 'accused her of having employed unfair means to procure the will. I am only repeating what you said.'

'I did so. I was hasty. I now regard both Mrs. and Miss Cusworth as incapable of such conduct.'

'Why!—what a weather-cock you are! You men are easily talked round by women. A cow has horns, a horse has hoofs, and a dog teeth, for self-protection; but a woman has only her tongue, which she can use skilfully—far more skilfully than the brutes use their weapons. Why, Philip, there are insects that accommodate themselves in colour and appearance to the ground they are on, or the tree or leaf they are

destroying, so as to escape detection ; and you would have this precious Salome less clever than an insect ? She has assumed the colour necessary for imposing on your eyes.'

Philip winced. He had changed his mind twice with respect to Salome, and both times in consequence of an interview with her.

'I have a proposal to make,' he said ; 'but before making it, I must lay the case before you plainly.'

'I desire nothing better, but I wish Lamb were here also.'

'I wish first to discuss it with you alone, after that we can take Lambert into conference.'

'I am all attention.'

'In the first place, I take it that my uncle made the will without having been subject to any direct pressure. Indirect there was, but that was also unconscious. The children had grown up in his house, he had become warmly attached to them, and when one was married, he provided for her.'

'Most unbecomingly and unnecessarily.'

'He did as he thought fit. The money was his own—his savings ; and he had a perfect right to dispose

of it as he considered proper. In full possession of his faculties, more than a twelvemonth ago, he made a marriage settlement of a large sum on one of the young ladies, and then, as she was provided for, he made his will, providing for the sister. Miss Salome had been as a daughter to him, he loved her not less than he did Miss Janet, and certainly had no intention that she should be left destitute when he was removed.'

'I grant you all that,' said Mrs. Sidebottom. 'He might have left her an annuity of fifty or a hundred pounds. That would have sufficed. But why leave her everything? But there—what is the good of discussing a document which is of no legal force?'

'Allow me to proceed. Whether he acted rightly or wrongly is a question I will not enter into. What he did was what he had proposed in his heart to do, to provide for Miss Salome, and to leave to Lambert and me only small annuities. He did not bequeath the factory to Lambert, whom he very well knew was not calculated to manage a business, and he did not leave it to me, because he knew nothing about my capabilities and character. I think it is by no means improbable that there is something else behind. Miss

Cusworth may be engaged to a suitable person, whom Uncle Jeremiah approved as one likely to carry on the business and not throw it away. I conceive that the will may have been prompted quite as much by concern for an old-established and respected business as by regard for the young girl. He may have calculated on the marriage, but not have cared to allude to it at an early stage of the engagement. This is merely a conjecture of mine, and I have no knowledge of anything to substantiate it. You must take it for what it is worth.'

'Oh, that is likely enough ; but as the will is cancelled, why harp upon it ?'

'Such I imagine was the mind of my uncle when he framed that will. In two words, he desired that the firm should be carried on, and that his adopted daughter should be provided for.'

'I allow all that.'

'Now the will has been invalidated in a mysterious manner by the signature being torn away. By whom that was done is not known to us, but I do not allow it is at all conclusive that Uncle Jeremiah did it himself.'

‘Of course he did it. He did it because I was in Mergatroyd, and he had come to value me. Besides, Lambert had changed his name ; he had ceased to be a Sidebottom, and had become a Pennycomequick. Indeed, he said as much to me. He was mightily pleased at the change. It was a compliment he took to heart.’

Philip frowned. His aunt had recollections of things said and done that came in very conveniently to support her theories.

‘My impression is,’ said Philip, ‘that the will was not torn by my uncle, but by someone else.’

‘And pray,’ said Mrs. Sidebottom, tossing her head and moving uneasily in her seat, ‘do you suspect anyone?’

‘I accuse no one,’ he said drily ; ‘I have no right without evidence to do so.’

‘Good gracious me!’ laughed Mrs. Sidebottom. ‘What an imagination you are endowed with, Philip! First it leads you to scheme out the whole story of the concoction and destruction of the will, and this you pour out on Salome Cusworth ; then you withdraw the charge, and you conceive a probable engagement

between this young minx and an Admirable Crichton, who is to manage the mill and carry on the business ; and now you have an idea of some outrageous fraud having been committed. Save us from such vagaries of the fancy !

‘ As it was my uncle’s intention that Miss Cusworth should be left comfortably off, and as—by whatever means his will has been mutilated—she is now left wholly unprovided for, which is most certainly against his wish, I propose to you that we, who become the heirs, should do something to assure to Miss Cusworth a provision at least equal in amount to that made for her sister.’

‘ I—I do not understand.’

‘ What I say is plain enough. We who share the property of my uncle must deduct from our shares in equal proportions such sum as will, when invested, bring in for the sole benefit of Miss Cusworth the modest sum of a hundred and fifty pounds per annum.’

‘ A hundred and fifty fiddlesticks !’ said Mrs. Sidebottom. ‘ I’ll be hanged before I agree to that !’

‘ To what extent, then, do you propose to meet my suggestion ?’

‘Not at all. I will not consent to give her a farthing!’

‘You decline to carry out the wishes of your brother?’

‘I dispute that they were his wishes—at one time maybe, before I arrived at Mergatroyd. After that he changed his mind altogether, and in evidence—he cancelled his will.’

‘I am by no means prepared to allow that that was his doing.’

‘A hundred and fifty pounds! Why, at four per cent. that would be nearly four thousand pounds. I would rather throw my money into the sea, or give it to a hospital.’

‘I repeat, it was the purpose of the testator to provide for Miss Cusworth. He had not altered his purpose on the night that he died, for he handed her the will to keep in such a manner——’

‘According to her own account,’ interjected Mrs. Sidebottom.

‘As showed that he believed the will was untouched. Either before that, or after—I cannot say when or by whom—the act had been committed which destroyed

the value of the will. But Uncle Jeremiah to the last intended that the young lady should be provided for.'

'I will consent to nothing.'

'Very well,' said Philip, 'as you cannot agree to my proposal, no other course is left me than to enter a *caveat* against your taking out an administration.'

'What good will that do?'

'It will do no good to anyone—to you least of all; I shall state my grounds before the Court—that I believe the will of my uncle, which I shall present, has been fraudulently dealt with by some person or persons unknown, and I shall endeavour to get it recognised, although it lacks his signature.'

'What!' exclaimed Mrs. Sidebottom, turning all colours of mottled soap. 'Throw away your chance of getting half!'

'Yes—because I will not be unjust.'

Mrs. Sidebottom was silent. She was considering. Her fidgets showed that she was alarmed.

'You will be able to effect nothing,' she said. 'The Court would say that Jeremiah acted improperly when he left his property away from his family, and that he did right in cancelling the will.'

‘Anyhow, I shall contest the grant of letters of administration.’

‘What a chivalrous knight that girl has found in you!’ sneered Mrs. Sidebottom. ‘You had better throw yourself at her feet altogether.’

Philip made no answer.

Mrs. Sidebottom fished up an antimacassar that had been on the back of her chair but had fallen from it, and had been worked into a rope by her movements in the chair. She pulled it out from under her, and threw it on the floor.

‘I detest these things,’ she said. ‘They are shoppy and vulgar. Only third-rate people, such as Cusworths, would hang them about on sofas and arm-chairs.’

Philip remained unmoved. He knew she was taking about antimacassars merely to gain time.

Presently he said, ‘I await your answer.’

Mrs. Sidebottom looked furtively at him. She was irritated at his composure.

‘Very well—as you like,’ she said, with a toss of her head; ‘but I did not expect this inhuman and unreasonable conduct in you, Philip.’

‘I take you at your word. That is settled between us. Now let us turn to another consideration. The mill must not be stopped, the business must be carried on. I do not suppose that Lambert cares to enter into commercial life.’

‘Certainly not.’

‘Or that you particularly relish life in Mergatroyd.’

‘I hate the place.’

‘I am quite willing to undertake the management of the factory, at first provisionally, till some arrangement has been come to between us. As soon as the administration is granted, we shall consider the division of the estate, and deduct equally from our several shares that portion which we have resolved to offer to Miss Cusworth.’

‘As you please,’ said Mrs. Sidebottom sulkily. ‘But you treat me abominably. However—now, I suppose, unopposed by you—I can ask for right to administer?’

‘Yes—on the conditions to which you have agreed.’

‘Wait — this house is mine, I suppose. Then I will clear it of those who are odious to me.’

She started from her seat and left the room.

CHAPTER XV.

THE WOMAN WITH A PIPE.

WHAT had become in the meantime of Mr. Jeremiah Pennycomequick, over whose leavings such a dispute was being waged? We left him clinging to the head of a Lombardy poplar that was being swept down the valley of the Keld by the flood.

The head of a poplar was by no means the most agreeable sort of vessel in which to shoot the rapids of Fleet Lock and navigate the lower Keld-dale. In the first place it allowed the wash of the descending current to overflow it, and in the next it had no proper balance, and was disposed to revolve like a turbine in the stream. This latter propensity was presently counteracted by the branches catching and entangling about some ponderous matter in the bed, perhaps a chain from the locks. It was not possible for Mr.

Pennycomequick to keep dry. He was like Moses in the cradle of bulrushes, from which the pitch calking had been omitted. He was completely drenched, because submerged except his head and shoulders, chilled, numb, and giddy.

The tree made a plunge over the lock edge, where the stream formed a cataract, carried him under water, and came up again with him still among the branches. He had seen the hut crumble into the stream before he made his dive. When the water cleared out of his eyes, and he looked again, he could see it no more.

He threw himself on his back, with his arms interlaced among the pliant boughs, and his face towards the night sky. He saw the clouds like curd, and the moon glaring pitilessly down on him in his distress, showing him a wide field of water on all sides and help nowhere. He was too cold to cry out ; he knew that it would be useless to do so. Succour was out of reach. Lying cradled among the branches, elastic as those of willow, he was fast as in a net ; bedded among the twigs, he might let go his hold and would be carried on. He looked up steadily at the moon,

and wondered how long it would be before his eyes stiffened and he saw the things of creation no longer. He could distinguish the shadows in the moon and make out the darkened portion of the disc. How cold and cheerless it must be yonder ! A life of numbness and lack of volition and impulse must be the lot of the Selenites ! Fear of death, anxiety for himself, had disappeared ; only a sort of curiosity remained in his brain to know whether the condition of life in the moon was more miserable in its chill and helplessness than his present state of drifting in the cold water.

Then he turned his head to take a last look at Mergatroyd. The lights were twinkling there. He could distinguish those of his own house on the hill-slope. He would never again set foot within its doors, enjoy the comfort of his fireside ; never see Salome again. And then in that odd, incongruous manner in which droll thoughts rise up in the mind at the most inappropriate moments, it occurred to him that there was to be anchovy-toast for breakfast. He had been asked by Mrs. Cusworth if he liked it, and she had promised it him. And as he drifted, immersed in the

deadeningly cold brown water, at the thought the taste of anchovy came into his mouth.

The valley of the Keld contracted—a spur of hill ran forward from the ridge on which Mergatroyd was built, and forced the river and canal to describe a semi-circular bend. The line, however, had bored itself a way through the hill, and came out beyond, in a park, among stately but blackened elms. The spur contracted the volume of the flood, which therefore became deeper and more rapid.

With his numbed hands Mr. Pennycomequick unloosed his white neckcloth, and with it bound his arm to a branch of the poplar, tying the knot with one hand and his teeth, whilst the water ran through his mouth over his tongue, and washed away from it the smack of anchovy that fancy had conjured to it.

Then he resigned himself to his lot. A dull sense of being in the power of an inexorable fate came over him, the eagerness for life had faded away, and was succeeded by indifference as to what befel him, this to make way, as the cold and misery intensified, for impatience that all might be over speedily. He still looked up at the moon, but no longer cared what the

life of the Selenites was like, it was their concern, not his. The thought of anchovy toast no longer had power to bring its flavour to his tongue. Then the moon passed behind a drift of vapour that obscured but did not extinguish it, and Jeremiah, half-unconsciously with his stiffening lips, found himself murmuring the words of Milton which he had learned at school, and had not repeated since :

‘ The wandering moon
Riding near her highest noon,
Like one that hath been led astray
Through the heav’ns wide pathless way,
And oft, as if her head she bow’d,
Stooping through a fleecy cloud.’

And so murmuring again, and more brokenly, at last fell into complete unconsciousness.

The critic who generally hits on those particulars in a story which are facts, to declare them to be impossibilities, and those characters to be unnatural, which are transcripts from nature, is certain to attack the author for making a man who trembles on the confines of death think of anchovy toast and quote ‘ *Il Penseroso* ;’ to which criticism we answer that he has had no experience such as that described, or he

would know that what has been described above is in accordance with nature.

For how long Mr. Pennycomequick was unconscious he never knew, and no one, of course, was able to inform him. When he returned to himself, he found that he was lying in a contracted and queer bed, in the side of a chamber equally contracted and queer, tenanted, as far as he could make out, only by a contracted and queer human being, whose sex was not to be determined at first glance. If Mr. Pennycomequick had recovered his sense of smell at the same time that he recovered his other senses, he would have supposed that during the period of unconsciousness he had been steeped in creosote, for the atmosphere about him was charged with the odour of tar.

He was, in fact, on board a coal-barge, in the little low cabin, and in the little low berth that occupied almost an entire side of the cabin. This cabin was but five feet high ; it was lighted by the hatchway, through which the steps descended into it. At the extremity, opposite the hatch, was an iron stove, the pipe from which poked through the deck above. At this stove was done all the cooking ever done in this

establishment, and all the washing supposed to be necessary in it, as a concession to public prejudice. On the side opposite Mr. Pennycomequick's berth was another, on which were heaped gowns, coats, wading-boots, a frying-pan, a bird-cage, a broken jug, Tom Treddlehoyle's 'Bairnsley-Folks' Almanack,' and a Bible. When that berth was tenanted by a human inmate, then the gowns, coats, boots, frying-pan, bird-cage, broken beer-jug, almanack and Bible were transferred to the floor.

Near the stove, peeling potatoes, and as she peeled them chucking the peelings on to the berth, with its accumulation of gowns, coats, frying-pan and other articles, was a woman wearing a man's black felt wide-awake, a man's coat, and smoking a mahogany-coloured pipe.

Her face was so brown, rugged, and masculine, that it was only possible to determine her sex when she stood up. Then she revealed petticoats, short, and fastened together between the calves, so as to convert them into something like Turkish trousers. Beneath them protruded feet as big as those of a man, encased in stout boots.

‘ Bless me !’ exclaimed Mr. Pennycomequick.
‘ Where am I ?’

Then the woman half rose. She could not stand upright in the cabin, she was so tall ; and she came over to the berth in stooping posture.

‘ Eh, lad, tha’rt wick ! Dos’t a’ want to know wheer tha’ art ? Why, for sure, tha’rt i’t *Conquering Queen*, as carries coils t’ Goole.’

‘ How came I here ?’

‘ Ah reckon ah hugged (drew) thee aht o’t water mysen. Ah saw thee floatin’ by on tha’ rig (back) taizled like i’ an owd tree. Sea (so) I had thee aht i’ a jiffy. If ah hed’dnt, tha’d been dead long ago. Hev naw a sup o’ tea, and we’ll talk after.’

Mr. Pennycomequick tried to move—to raise himself—but he was stiff in all his joints, and unable to stir more than his head.

‘ Weel naw !’ exclaimed the woman, ‘ tha’rt wor nor I thowt. Ah be main sorry for thee. Ah’ll bring t’ peggy-tub, and turn’t upside daan, and sot me a top, t’ll do as weel as owt. Ah can talk ta thee a bit—I da’ant mind. But I’m glad tha’rt better, lad. Come na,’ if tha woant ha’ no tea, mebbe tha’ll tak a sup o’ tar-water.’

By degrees Mr. Pennycomequick got to understand how he had been rescued, and where he was.

The flood had caught the *Conquering Queen* coal barge some way below Mergatroyd, where the land was flat, and where accordingly the water had spread and its violence was expended. It had snapped the cable that fastened the boat, and she had been carried on down the canal. She had not been lifted and stranded beyond the banks, but had gone along with the current in the proper course. The *Conquering Queen* was the property of Ann Dewis, who inhabited and managed her, along with a boy, a gawky lad of fifteen, all legs and arms, which became entangled among ropes and chains, and stumbled over lumps of coal and mooring posts, who never descended the ladder without slipping and falling to the bottom in a heap; and whose face and body, if not perpetually begrimed with coal dust, would have shown blue with bruises.

Ann Dewis had given up her berth to the man she had drawn out of the water, and slept on the floor beside the clothing, bird-cage, cooking utensils, and literature sacred and profane.

‘Sure sartain,’ said Mrs. Dewis, ‘t’ull be a long time wal (until) thar’t better ; and curias it es, but all wor profezied i’ Tom Treddlehoyle i’ hes predicshons for 1870. Jest yo listen till this. November : Ah look for menny foakes bein’ brawt low, throo abaht t’ middle ta t’end a’ t’munth ; hahiver, theaze a good prospecht a’ ther’ sooin lookin’ up agean, if it is at they’re laid flat a’ ther’ back. T’es fortunate these floods doant come offance (often) or we’d a’ be ruined. Looik here, lad, ah’l clap t’ pot o’t’stove an’ mak thee poultices for thy joints.’

Six weeks were passed by Mr. Jeremiah Pennycomequick in the cabin of the *Conquering Queen*, in great pain, sometimes in delirium, for he was attacked with rheumatic fever. Throughout his illness he was attended indefatigably by Ann Dewis. She called in no doctor, she procured no medicine. The sole remedy she knew and favoured, and which she exhibited against all diseases, was tar-water, a remedy easily made on board the barge, of material always at hand.

Ann Dewis was reduced to temporary inactivity by the destruction wrought by the flood. The canal

was closed for repairs, and the repairs were likely to consume many months. Accordingly she could no longer ply between the coalpits and the wharf on the Humber. This enforced inactivity enabled her to devote her undivided attention to her patient. She had no house of her own—not an acre ; no, not a foot of garden ground of her own in any of the various forms of ownership—freehold, copyhold or leasehold. She had no other home than her barge. She paid no taxes—no rates ; the only charges that fell on her were the dues levied at the locks. And ‘ Darn it ! ’ said Ann ; ‘ that flood will ha’ sent up the dues like scaldin’ water sends up t’momenter.’

She belonged to no parish, came into no census, was attached to no denomination, and was identifiable as a Yorkshire woman of the West Riding only by her brogue. When the fever quitted Jeremiah Pennycomequick, it left him weak as a child. He lay in the berth powerless to rise, and long after his mind had cleared his joints were swollen and painful. He foresaw that many weeks, perhaps months, must elapse before he regained his former strength.

She did her best to amuse her patient as well as to

cure him. She read to him the richest jokes out of 'Tom Treddlehoyle,' and puzzled him with questions from the same, compounded as conundrums. But what interested him chiefly was her account of herself.

She had been married, but that was nowt but a scratch, she said. 'Wunce I thowt for sartain sure ah'd hev to give up to be Dewis, and stick to the Schofield.'

'Schofield!' said Mr. Pennycomequick, and passed his hand over his brow. His memory was somewhat affected. The name was familiar to him, but he did not recollect when he had heard it.

'Eh, lad, it wor a thing of no consekans. Ah'll tell thee t' tale.' For the benefit of south country readers we will to some extent modify the broad West Riding brogue.

'It was na' lang that Earle and I were acquainted——'

'Earle?'

'Eh, every man has two names, as he has two legs, and two arms, and two eyes and ears. He was called Earle Schofield for sartain; and he used to come and visit me in t' *Conquering Queen*. My mother was

dead, and had left me a tidy bit o' brass, for shoo was a saving woman, an' shoo had been cap'n, boatswain, steward, and all to t' *Conquering Queen* ever sin' my father died. All t' brass he and she had addled (earned) was kip in—but there I wi'nt tell thee, not that I mistrust thee, but we're all frail creeturs, and terribly tempted. So there, lad, this here pipe belonged to Earle. He wor a bit o' a gentleman, he wor. He'd niver been in a coil barge trading up an' down t' canal. We'd a famous scheme atwixt us. He was to set up a coil store an' a hoffis by t'warf at Hull, an' he sed that he knew o' a chap as 'ud sell t'good-will and all his custom for a hundred pounds. And Earle—he wor an uncommon clever hand at accounts, he figured it a' up on a slate, and he showed me how great 'ud be our profits. And he to'd me that it wor the coil marchants as got a' t'profits out o' t'sale o' coils, and I got nobbut their crumbs, as I may say. And he showed me how if he sold and I carried coils we'd be rich in no time, and after we'd got married then I tow'd him where I kep' t'brass. I didn't tell him before—believe me. We were sitting on this deck, drawed up by t'side o' t'wharf at Hull, as he showed

a' that, and as I tow'd him where I had my brass. Then he took t'pipe he wor smoking out o' his mouth and put it into mine, and sed I wor to kip it aleet wall he came back, he'd go an' deposit a hundred pound, he sed, for t'good-will, and secure the hoffis at wunce. And I let him take all my brass, for sartain I thow't as we'd been married for three weeks all war right, and what was mine was his. He took t'brass, and he went ashore, and t'last words he sed to me wor, "Ann, keep t'pipe aleet wall I return." I waited, but from that day I've niver clapt eyes on him.'

'And your money?'

'Nor on that noather.'

'What a great rascal he must have been!'

'Nay, I won't say that. We're a' sinful creeturs, and our temptations is terrible. Wot became o' him I can'na say, but for sure sartin he'd a mind to retarn to me, or he'd not ha' tow'd me keep t'pipe aleet. Wha can tell, he may ha' got a drop o' liquor on shore, and ha' been robbed, and then ashamed to come back and tell me; or he may ha' found t'chap none so ready to sell t'good-will—and so ha' gone about looiking for summat else and not found it—or

he may ha' been took by them rampagin' an' roarin' lions, as seek whom they can lock up—the perlice. Nay ! I'll not condemn him, and allow that he wor a rascal, for what sez Tom Treddlehoyle :

“This world, we all naw, hez its ups and its daans,
An' shorter, wi'r time keeps windin',
An' day after day we are crost i' wir way,
Then speak of a man as yo find him.”

‘But I think you found him serve you badly enough,’ said Mr. Pennycomequick, from his berth, ‘to walk off with your savings and leave you with nothing,’

‘Nay, not exactly,’ answered Anne. ‘There wor this pipe for wun, he left ; and,’ after a pause, ‘there wer Jozeph. T’bairn came varra comfortin’ when I wer i’ a tew aboot loising ma’ brass. Besides, t’ lad, Joe, ha’ been ov use to me as much as I paid a lad afore seven shilling a week, and he hev a’ been t’same to me for six years. If tha comes ta reckon at fifty-two weeks i’t year, that’s eighteen pound ten per hannum ; and for six year that mounts up to nigh on a hundred and ten pound, which is a scoering off of t’ account.’

‘ And that is his pipe you are smoking ?’

‘ Ees, for sartaen. I sed I’d keep’t aleet, and if he comes back at t’ end o’ seven more year, I’ll say, “ There, Earle, is t’ pipe burning, and as for’t account, Joe hev a’ scored it off, interest and principal.’

CHAPTER XVI.

WHO ? WHAT ?

IT is hateful—hateful as poison—the packing, the turning out of drawers, and then the tilting of the drawers to get out the dust and grit and flue that has accumulated in the corners ; the arranging of correspondence, the discrimination between valuables and things that may become valuable, and things that are not, but were valuable ; the throwing away of rubbish, the consideration as to what things are to be disposed of, and if disposed of, how to be disposed of, and to whom, and all the business and care and misery of change of quarters.

And yet, how out of thorns spring roses, and out of troubles virtues come into bloom ! Never, probably, in our whole career did charity, the bond of all virtues, so luxuriate, throw out such all-embracing

tendrils, emit such fragrance, ripen into such fruit, as on the occasion of change of quarters. Old boots, slightly damaged bonnets, heavy battered pieces of furniture, for which a dealer would not give sixpence ; articles that would fetch nothing in a sale, antiquated school-books, magazines five years old, novels that have lost their backs, games, deficient in one or two pieces, odd gloves, iron bedsteads minus their brass knobs, and that have to be tied together with wire ; cracked dishes, snipped tumblers, saucepans corroded with rust—with what lavish and lordly magnificence we distribute them to all who will accept such alms.

And then—what a lesson does change of quarters teach us, to discriminate between the worthless and the valuable ; and with equanimity to endure separation from things which have become interesting to us, but which we cannot remove. When the author was a boy, his life was spent in travelling on the Continent ; in rambles from the Pyrenees to the plains of Hungary, from the Mediterranean to the Baltic, and wherever he went, he made collections of objects of curiosity, crystals, petrifications, dried flowers, butter-

flies, mediæval armour, books. Before quitting any place of sojourn for a winter, or halt for a night, his father explored every pocket and crevice of the carriage, and turned out the treasures there secreted, on which his son's heart were set and his pocket-money had been expended.

Nothing escaped his eye, nothing melted his heart. The author came to a place bringing nothing with him, and left it, carrying nothing with him away, all he acquired he was forced to leave. It was an excellent discipline for life, and yet hardly attained ; even to this day he finds that he clings to trifles.

How many times since boyhood has he had to shift quarters? and each time he has experienced a struggle, and has had to surrender some things on which his heart was fixed, but from which it was, perhaps, well to be free. He recalls how one winter at Bayonne, he collected every match and spill-end that had been used for lighting cigars and candles till he had accumulated a trunk full. When, in spring, the move came, his father peremptorily refused to despatch this trunk-load of scorched paper scraps by *grande* or *petite vitesse* to Vienna, and they were consigned to the

flames. When he was in Yorkshire, he had collected some prehistoric querns, stone hand-mills. When he contracted with a furniture-mover to translate his goods to the south of England, the man struck at the mill-stones, they were not in his bond. The author had to resign them; but his heart aches for those stones to this day.

When a family has inhabited a house for nigh on twenty years, it is incredible what accumulations have gathered round them, how every corner, cupboard, closet, drawers, the cellar, the attic are stuffed with articles of various utility and importance, or let us rather say of different degrees of inutility and worthlessness; none of which, however, can be spared without a pang, for to every one of them a recollection clings.

The Cusworths had been, not indeed twenty years, but approaching that time, in the house of Mr. Pennycomequick. Every room, the garden, the attic, were crowded with reminiscences, mostly pleasant; to the ordinary eye a thin veil of soot took the brilliance and sharpness off all things in this smoke-laden part of England, but to the girls, Salome and Janet, every-

thing was overlaid with the gold dust of childish memories. Mrs. Cusworth had come to regard the house as a quiet home in which she might spend her declining days, without a care for the future of her children, for Janet was provided for, and Salome would not be forgotten. But now, with the loss of Mr. Pennycomequick, the prop had fallen on which the future was reared; and suddenly she found herself in bad health, obliged to think about her prospects, and leave the house in quest of another home.

Mrs. Sidebottom, with the eagerness with which some women fly to do a spiteful thing, had taken advantage of her position to give the widow notice to remove.

The Cusworths had received notice to move within a fortnight, and it was not easy for them to find quarters into which to go. Salome had sought lodgings in Mergatroyd, but in vain. There none were vacant, and she had been obliged to engage temporarily a part of a house in the nearest manufacturing town, a house that was called Redstone, but which was popularly known only as Blackhole. It was a

low house, surrounded by tall factories that crushed it into a well between them, into which no sun could penetrate, but which received all day and night showers of condensed soot. She counted herself fortunate in having secured this, and she had already given orders for the removal to it of some of the packing-cases filled with their goods.

The time had been one of strain to Salome, already distressed by the loss of her best friend, and the subsequent doubt about the identity of the corpse recovered. Mrs. Sidebottom had gone out of her way to make her feel uncomfortable, had said ill-natured things, had slighted her mother, and irritated Janet to the verge of an outbreak. She had been obliged to exercise great self-control, to disregard the sneers of Mrs. Sidebottom, to screen her mother and hold her sister in check. She had been painfully affected, moreover, by the mistrust Philip had shown, and though he had apologized for what he had said, the wound dealt to her self-respect was unhealed. She felt this blow the more because she had unconsciously reposed confidence in Philip ; not that he had given her reason for reliance on him, but that she had felt

the need for someone to whom to look, now that Mr. Jeremiah Pennycomequick was removed, and she had trusted that he would be honourable and considerate in his conduct, as behoved a Pennycomequick.

To add to her difficulties, her mother had suddenly and unaccountably had a relapse, was seriously shaken, and in no condition to be moved. Unaccountably, for the attack had not come on when it might have been expected—on hearing the news of the death of the old manufacturer. She had borne up marvellously under this trial ; the bringing the corpse to the house and the funeral had not materially affected her. She had spoken of the necessity she was under of leaving the house with sorrow, indeed, but not agitation ; she had taken some interest in the assortment and packing of the family goods ; and then, in the midst of the preparations to depart, had been taken alarmingly ill.

When the funeral was over, Mrs. Sidebottom had returned to her own house. All necessity for her remaining in that of her deceased half-brother was gone. Nevertheless, she was in and out of the house several times during the day.

One evening she had left after nine, having dined there with her nephew, who had moved into his uncle's apartments, and had enjoyed some of her brother's best wine.

At half-past nine the front-door was locked and chained, and the gaslight in the hall turned down, but not extinguished. Old Mr. Pennycomequick had kept early hours, and the servants observed the same routine of meals and work that had been instituted in his time, as they had received no orders to the contrary. Now that Philip had taken possession of his uncle's apartments on the first-floor, and went to the mill at the same hours, and took his meals at the same hours, the house seemed to have relapsed into its old ways, out of which it had been bustled by the advent of Mrs. Sidebottom.

Mr. Pennycomequick's apartments consisted of a study, with a bedroom opening out of it. The front of the house on the same floor was taken up with a drawing-room, rarely occupied. A third door on the same landing admitted into the spare bedroom, in which the corpse of the drowned man had laid till the burial.

On the ground-floor were two rooms, corresponding to those occupied by Mr. Pennycomequick, and these had been given up to Mrs. Cusworth, one—the outer—served as sitting-room. The dining-room and a breakfast-room—the latter under the spare bed-chamber—completed the arrangement on the ground-floor. Formerly Mrs. Cusworth and her daughters had slept on the story above the drawing-room and Mr. Pennycomequick's suite, and Salome's apartment were there still; but of late, owing to her mother's infirmity, her bed had been transferred to the inner room, which had been transformed from the house-keeper's office to a sleeping-apartment for the old lady, to whom it was injurious to ascend many steps; and as it was not advisable that Mrs. Cusworth should be alone at night, Salome had slept in the room with her. Since the arrival of Janet, however, she had returned to her apartment upstairs, as the old lady had expressed a wish to have her married daughter with her.

‘My dear,’ she had said, ‘it is not much more that I can expect to see of Janet. She will have to return to her husband before long, and I am not likely to live

to have the pleasure of many of her visits ; so, if you do not mind, Salome, I should wish her to sleep in my room whilst she is here, that I may have her by me as much as I may.'

Salome had accordingly returned to her chamber upstairs. She was glad that at this time her sister was there to relieve her of attendance on her mother, whilst she went in search of lodgings and was engaged in packing.

'I am expecting a summons to return to Elbœuf every day,' said Janet, 'directly I get the news of the route of the Prussians. Providence never intended that barbarism should prevail over culture ; and the French have such accomplished manners, and such perfect taste—why, the German ladies I have seen have no idea how to dress.'

'You forget, Janet,' said the sister, 'that the barbarians did, of old, overwhelm Roman civilization.'

'Oh yes ; but only that they might assimilate the culture, and become civilized themselves. If the result of this wretched war were that German ladies learned how to put on their clothes tastefully, I could almost forgive Sedan and Metz.'

Salome had as little knowledge of the arrangement arrived at between Mrs. Sidebottom and Philip as has the reader, and for the same reason. It had not been divulged. She, of course, could ask no questions. The reader does, but he must wait. He shall be told presently. Suffice it for him to know that Mrs. Sidebottom had, unopposed, sworn to her brother's death, without will, and had taken out letters of administration.

Philip did not have his meals with the Cusworth party; they were served to him apart.

On this evening, after the house was locked up, and the servants had retired to bed, Salome was in her own room; she had been engaged there for some hours, examining and sorting the house-bills, and destroying such as were not required to be preserved. When this was done, she began to pack her little library in a deal case, first wrapping each volume carefully in newspaper. As she did this she came on a garden manual that Mr. Pennycomequick had given her on her birthday when fifteen. The sight of this book suddenly reminded her of a score of hyacinth-bulbs she had put in a dark closet under

the stairs, in which to form shoots before they were put in their glasses. The book had advised this as a corrective to the development of leaf at the expense of flower. In this cupboard, which Janet and she as children had named the Pummy closet—a name that had adhered to it ever since—she kept as well sundry garden requisites.

Fearful lest she should forget the bulbs if she postponed their removal to another time, and accustomed, on principle, to do at once whatever occurred to her mind as a thing that had to be done, she gently opened her door and lightly descended the staircase.

The steps were carpeted, so that her foot was noiseless. She had no need of a candle, for the gas, though reduced, still burnt in the hall.

She reached the bottom quickly; she was unwilling to disturb and alarm her mother, and so trod noiselessly through the hall to the closet door, beneath the steps. Her garden-gloves, some tools in a little box that had been given her by Janet, and the bulbs were there, the latter, in a row, showing stout horns. She gathered these bulbs into a chip-basket, and took the rest of her possessions in the other hand. Thus en-

cumbered, she closed the Pummy closet door with her foot, put down the basket, turned the key, took up the basket and stepped out into the hall with the intention of reascending the stairs as noiselessly as she had come down.

But before she had reached the foot and had turned the balustrade, she was startled to see a figure on the first landing. At first shock she thought it was Mr. Jeremiah Pennycomequick dressed to go out, as she had seen him on the night that he disappeared. If the hour was not now midnight, it was near it.

Salome could not see whence the figure had come, whether from Philip's room or from the spare bedroom. Only from the drawing-room he could not have issued, as that door was in view, and was shut.

Who was it?

The figure descended slowly, and with inaudible tread. The light from the gas was sufficient to show that the figure was that of a man, but not to let her see his face.

With a sickening feeling at the heart, and a chill that ran through every artery and frosted her blood, and deprived her both of motion and the will to

move, she stood looking at the apparition that glided down the staircase, leisurely, noiselessly. She recognised the great-coat and hat—they were those of Mr. Pennycomequick. The great coat was that in which the corpse had been discovered invested.

Who was this coming—coming probably from the room recently tenanted by that strange, awful, dead man?

That was the first thought of horror that shot through her brain, followed by another still more horrible, ‘What is it?’

For a while Salome was bereft of power of speech and motion. There was a sensation in her brain as though a handle were being turned that had attached to it every nerve in her body, and that they were being spun off her and on to a reel, like silk from a cocoon. Her hands contracted on what she held; she could not have let them fall had she willed to relax her grasp. They stiffened as do the hands of a corpse. She could not cry out, her tongue was paralyzed. She could not stir a step forward or backward; all control over her knees was gone from her.

When the figure had nearly reached the bottom of the stairs, it stopped and turned its head towards her, and looked at her.

The light of the lowered gas-jet was on her and off the face of the apparition ; all she saw was black shadow, as all she had seen of the face of the corpse on the bed had been—a black handkerchief cast over it. But she distinguished the hair, somewhat long behind the ears, and frowzy whiskers about the jaws. That was all she could make out in that moment of acute; agonizing horror. The figure stood looking at her, and she heard the clock in the hall, tick, tick, tick, tick, and then begin the premonitory growl that preceded striking. The figure moved down the final steps, and stole in the same stealthy, noiseless manner to the garden door, and disappeared through it.

The look of the back, the set of the well-known overcoat, the way in which the hat was worn, all recalled to her the dear, lost friend, and yet she knew it could not be he. He would never have inspired her with shuddering dread. He would not have passed her without a word.

In another moment the spell of rigidity was taken

off her. The blood rushed tingling through every vein, her hands, her feet, recovered activity, her heart bounded and shook off its fear, and her mind recovered its proper energy.

She ran after the apparition, and found that the garden door was actually open. Instantly, without further consideration, she shut and locked it, and then flew upstairs and knocked vehemently, loudly, at Philip Pennycomequick's door.

He opened it, and was surprised to see Salome on the landing, breathless.

'Is your mother worse?' he asked, for he saw that she was shaking and white.

'Oh, Mr. Pennycomequick, do tell me. Have you had a man here with you?'

'I do not understand.'

'I have seen someone descend the stairs. If he did not come from your study, he issued from that room in which—in which——' She shuddered. 'I mean from the spare bedroom.'

'No one has been with me.'

'But he came down the staircase, slowly and silently, like a shadow, and passed me.'

‘I have seen and heard no one.’

‘And yet, there has been someone in the house.’

Philip thought, and then said: ‘Miss Cusworth, your nerves have been over-wrought. You have been imposed on by your imagination.’

‘But—the garden door. I found it open. I have just locked it. The figure went out through it.’

‘Did you distinguish who it was?’

‘No, he came from the best bedroom, wearing dear uncle’s—I mean Mr. Pennycomequick’s overcoat and hat.’

Philip again mused.

‘All my poor uncle’s clothing,’ he said, after a moment of thought, ‘all that remained, the overcoat included, I ordered yesterday to be laid out in the spare chamber. I told your mother to dispose of them as she thought proper. I made no doubt that she knew of poor persons to whom they would be serviceable.’

‘But no poor person would come at this time of night, and slip out stealthily at the garden door, which ought to be locked at half-past nine.’

‘Let us go into the spare room and reassure our-

selves,' said Philip. 'You will find the overcoat there, and then, perhaps, you will come to the same conclusion that I have, that you have been over-worried and over-wrought, and that fancy has conjured up the ghost.'

He went back into his room for a candle, and Salome, standing alone, with beating heart, on the landing, asked herself whether she had been deluded by her imagination.

Philip returned with the candle. He smiled and said: 'I remember particularly that great-coat. It was laid on the bed, and the hat by it. I went into the room this evening, about half-past eight, and both were there then.' He had his hand on the door. 'You are not afraid to come in with me?'

Salome shook her head. She had begun to hope that she had been a prey to fancy.

He opened the door, went in, and held the light over his head. The great coat and the hat—were gone !

END OF VOL. I.



